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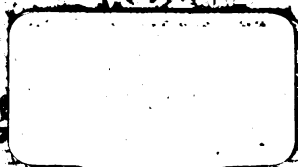
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P E R I L .

A Nobel.

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL,

AUTHOR OF 'THE FIRST VIOLIN,' 'HEALEY,' 'PROBATION,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

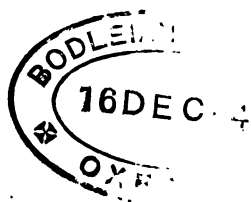


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P E R I L .



PART I.—continued.







CHAPTER XI.

PAUL LAWFORD TO MRS. WOODFALL.

I WONDER how all this will end, Katty, my dear. I am going to give you the history of my last mystification, which you can read or not, as you wish—I fancy you will.

‘ Hugh went away on Wednesday evening. I missed, and do yet miss him, very much in the office ; but I did my best, and succeeded tolerably well. After all, it doesn’t require much brains to do the work which, with kindly consideration for my limited capacities, they have set for me here. On the Thursday morning I had to depend entirely on my own

exertions, for the day before Hankinson had been ill, and was now as cross as a bear. I have noticed a change coming lately over the spirit of that man's dream. What may be the cause of it I can't say, of course. But that is not the mystification I have to tell you about. I went home, as usual. The evenings do not seem half so long since I have had something to do in the daytime. Now that the pinch is over, I may tell you that those days in January and the first part of February—just before I went to old Nowell's dinner-party — were black enough — so black that sometimes I felt as if I would cut my throat for a toss-up. I suppose a lot of people would say that considering I had enough secure, to grind on with, that was a most idiotic frame of mind to be in; but every day it is more strongly borne in upon my mind that man does not live by bread alone, and that perhaps those are not always the

worst cases of starvation which are the most obvious and the most material. At any rate, I could not describe to you, and would not if I could, out of consideration for your feelings, the sensation that used to come crawling over me, like one of those "slimy things that crawl with legs upon a slimy sea," when I woke in the morning and looked round my room, and went downstairs and saw the wretched, sordid little room, empty alike of voice or face to bless one with the sight or sound of it, and realized that practically there was nothing for me to do but sit there all day long. That is over now ; copying out invoices and writing orders or acknowledging them is excitement after that.

‘ I went home then, as I say, and had just sat down to my dinner, when the servant brought a note to me saying that it came from Mr. Nowell’s, and that the messenger waited for answer. It was from Peril,

written in a small, fine Italian hand, like delicate little traceries and tendrils—the last kind of hand I should have expected her to write. I may as well give it you all, for it was short.

““ DEAR MR. LAWFORD,

““ My grandfather desires me to say that if you are at liberty this evening, and would call any time after seven, he would be very glad to see you, as he particularly wishes to speak to you. If you will kindly send a verbal answer by the bearer of this, it will be quite enough.

““ Yours very truly,

““ PERIL NOWELL.”

‘ My verbal message was to the effect that I would be round in about half an hour. I did not waste much time in wondering what had procured me the honour of an invitation

from Nowell senior as soon as Nowell junior's back was turned ; but as soon as I was ready, I made my way to Great North Street. While I was taking off my overcoat, and the servant stood by waiting, the door of the library was opened, and Miss Nowell emerged from it.

“ How do you do, Mr. Lawford ? ” she said very gravely and gently ; and then she said to the maid, “ You need not wait. I am going upstairs, and I will take Mr. Lawford with me.”

‘ The girl went away, and then Peril said to me :

“ Come in here ; I want to speak to you.” With which she took hold of my arm, and literally led me into the room and closed the door after us. I was somewhat surprised in secret, but I had some time ago resolved that it was not of the least use to betray any astonishment about anything that went on

here, so I looked as if nothing were happening. There was a much brighter light here than in the hall, and when I looked at Peril, I was more startled and more shocked than with anything else. She looked the phantom of her usual self—pale, haggard, and woe-begone, and with a look in her eyes of the most devouring anxiety that I ever saw. Her voice was quick and low when she spoke.

“Did you send for me, Miss Nowell, or was it really a message from Mr. Nowell?”

“Oh, it was from him, certainly,” she said; “and it is that that I want to speak to you about. He means mischief.”

“Her eyes were distended, and her face white. She bent forward and stared at me. Wondering what it could be to me, or how I could possibly prevent it if he did mean mischief, however black, I rather feebly said, “Indeed!” and waited to hear more.

“ Hugh has gone away, as you know,” she said.

“ Yes.”

“ Mrs. Robson has gone too. She left this afternoon.”

“ Mrs. Robson !” I was really amazed at this. “ I thought she never left Mr. Nowell ?”

“ She never does, generally. Twice only, since he began to be out of health, has she ever gone. It wrung her heart to have to go to-day. The idea of leaving him alone in my clutches nearly turned her brain. Nothing short of absolute necessity would have driven her off, as you may suppose. She got a telegram this morning to say that her only sister, who lives near Leicester, has not many days to live. Unfortunately for her, she is not in the habit of getting telegrams ; she wondered what it could be all about, and read it aloud to us, so that both

grandpapa and I became acquainted with the contents of it. After that, there was nothing for her but to go. It would have looked too brutal to say she did not care whether her dear sister lived or died. But I saw that she could have bitten her tongue off with vexation. You see, if she had had sufficient presence of mind to keep quiet, we need not have known what there was in the telegram."

"But her only sister——"

"Peril laughed. "Really, Mr. Lawford! Well, she went off in great agony; it was like tearing herself bodily away. She said she did not know what in the world he would do without her. He told her—you know how polite and grateful he always is—that she was not so indispensable as she supposed, and that he and I would get on splendidly together. I really thought she would have screamed when she heard that, but she had to conceal her anguish and go. Scarcely had

the cab rattled away with her this afternoon, than he called me to him, spoke quite affectionately to me, so that it made my blood run cold to listen to him, and told me to write that note to you. So I did."

"And I obeyed with pleasure, though I am at a loss to imagine what he can want with me."

"Listen to me," she said, drawing very close to me, and speaking beneath her breath. "He is going to ask you questions—about Hugh. He is suspicious. Suspicion is the breath of life to him. Whatever you say, tell him nothing about Hugh which can possibly prejudice him against him."

"It may be rather difficult not to do so, if he has made up his mind in advance to be prejudiced against him," I said. I will own to you, Katty, that I found it a little difficult to keep my head steady, as she stood, having forgotten everything except her one object—

with her hands grasping my arm, and that wonderful face gazing into mine. Does she think one is made of granite, or iron? But of course I knew all the time that she did not *think* anything about it. She is over head and ears in love with Hugh; she was thinking of him, and of what was to be done for him. And, as I was under the impression that Mr. Nowell did believe in Hugh, whatever he might think of everybody else, I was bewildered, as well as startled. She seemed to grow impatient at the blank way in which I looked at her, for she gave my arm a little jerk, and said :

‘ “ Don’t you understand ? ”

‘ “ No,” I confessed, “ I don’t. What has made him suspicious of Hugh? For, most certainly he trusted him, up to a very short time ago. He trusted him implicitly.”

‘ She loosed her hold of my arm. Her hands sank down at her sides. I shall never

forget the dreadful look on her face, as she said to me :

“ What has made him suspicious ? I have made him suspicious.”

“ But, my dear Miss Nowell——”

“ Hush! I know all about it. It was last night. I quarrelled with Hugh—the worst quarrel I ever had with him—I do not mean that we have not said harder things to each other, for we have, many a time. Indeed, he was hardly angry at all. He was a great deal worse—he was forgiving. It was all because of that woman—that Margaret Hankinson, whom he loves—oh, Mr. Lawford, you did not tell me true that night, when you said his love for her was a passing fancy, such as many a man had had for a woman older than himself: it is earnest, it is real. She is his saint upon earth, and the woman whom he loves and wants to marry, too.”

“I could but say what I thought and believed,” I urged. “How could I tell? It was what, judging from experience, I supposed must be the case.”

“It is not the case—and we had this quarrel, though it did not begin about that. And while he was prating about her, I was feeling as if I should go mad. Why, I was mad, I know—perfectly mad. I never felt so horrible in all my life. Why should I pretend to deny it? you must have seen it long ago. He is everything in the world to me—my life, and my hope, and my light; and surely I had more reason to expect that he should love me, than that other woman—look at me! was there anything strange in my idea that he might return my love?”

‘Katty, instead of being ridiculous, as ninety-nine men and women out of a hundred would have been, in making such a confession, this girl was sublime. There was

• nothing absurd, nothing weak about her. I should wonder that a lad like Hugh Nowell could have inspired her with such a passion, only I know what a woman—or a man either—will idealize and worship, when they have *nothing else*. That Mrs. Robson is a stupid, silly woman. She might have tamed Peril, and taken away her sting, at the very first, by kindness and firmness. That I will always maintain. I thought out all this, and more, as she stood before me, with her hands spread out, as if to say, “See, he has rejected this ; he has despised *me*.” And at last I said, slowly, but I think with conviction :

“There was nothing strange about it. The mystery is that it should have turned out otherwise.”

‘She scarcely seems to regard me as a person—an individual—more as a machine endowed with a certain degree of intelligence

to which she can confide the story of her wrongs.

““ I left him,” she said. “ I rushed upstairs. On the first landing I felt my knees tremble under me. I felt as if I could not get up the other stairs. I went into the drawing-room, and there I saw my grandfather alone.”

‘ She paused, and then went on, quite composedly, but not with a sort of composure that one cares to see :

““ I walked up to the fireplace. Grandpapa asked me one or two questions, and at last wanted to know why Hugh was going off to London in such a hurry ? I said, perhaps he was going to give more assistance to the Hutchinsons——”

““ Oh, Miss Nowell !”

““ You said to me once, that there was danger I might inadvertently say something to Hugh’s detriment. I said I could not do so inadvertently. No more I could. I knew

quite well what I was saying, and I went on with it, and told him all about Hugh and the Hutchinsons—I wish you would strike me! she broke in abruptly; “I wish you would do something to me that I deserve, or call me some name, or something. When I had told him—and if Hugh had been standing there I would have gone on with the same words—I walked away, and left him to meditate upon it, and he has been doing so ever since. They have both gone away. I am here alone with him, and I can see that he is going over everything in his mind, but he does not tell me anything. I think he wants to question you with a view to finding out a few more crimes and enormities of Hugh’s. My punishment is coming; I feel it drawing towards me. I do not know what it will be yet, but it is coming—coming, and it will strike me through *him*—I know that. Oh, Mr. Lawford, I am not unreasonable,

am I, in asking you to do what you can to uphold Hugh's dear name? I am a very bad, miserable girl, and I have no right whatever to trouble you with my wretched concerns, but you also care for him a little—he is your friend. And the very first time I saw you, when he brought you here, I read in your face that you were kind and gentle, and generous, and that is why I appeal to you now.”

‘She looked at me with her eyes swimming in tears; her throat choking down the sobs that rose in it. I did not say much. I told her that, so far as I could, I would baffle his cunning, but that I trusted more to his knowledge of Hugh's necessity to him for the preservation of his money than to anything else for keeping him straight. But I would do what I could.

‘“Thank you, thank you—God bless you! You are a real friend to one who does not

deserve any kindness from you or anyone," she said. "Now come upstairs. We have been here long enough."

'I followed her upstairs. She opened the drawing-room door, and said, quite briskly and cheerfully :

' "Grandpapa, here's Mr. Lawford. I'll leave you to have your talk with him," and so disappeared.

'Now, what the old rascal really wanted with me is more than I can tell, for he asked me very few questions about Hugh. He asked me far more about the office, and about Hankinson, and what I did there, and how much they paid me. He did inquire how long I had known Hugh, and some questions of that kind. He looked vindictive, but he presently dismissed me, and I went away. I greatly desired to see Peril again, but she did not give me the chance, and I had to go away unsatisfied. Whether she thought she

had overdone her alarm, and felt ashamed of her excitement and of the confessions she had made ; whether she was literally afraid to ask me what had taken place—I don't know, but I did not see her again ; and what is brewing in his mind I don't know.'

Written on the following evening.

'We got a grand fright in the office this morning—at least, Hankinson did, if I am not much mistaken. I wonder if he has ever done anything he ought not to have done—in business, I mean. The time at which the alarm occurred was about noon. My desk is in the outer office—not the most distinguished part of the establishment—don't suppose it. But Hankinson had sent for me into his office to speak to me, and I had left the door open. He was telling me about some letters I had to write. Suddenly we heard a little fuss and bustle in the outer office, and then a

voice—the voice—the Snarl, of which I have spoken to you before, and which no one could mistake.

“ Well, what are you all doin’ ?” said this voice. I lifted my head, as one does at an unexpected voice or sound, and I caught sight of Hankinson’s face, reflected in a small square looking-glass which hung on the opposite wall. It was ashen-white—ghastly to look at. The flag of fear, or guilt, or apprehension, or something was hung out upon his cheeks, plainly enough to be seen. The only thing is, these flags show the same colour for so many and such very opposite emotions. But there it was, and it startled me, as appearing on the face of a very high-class manager of such very extensive factories. After a moment, it disappeared, and he said, quietly enough, as he placed the bundle of drafts in my hands :

“ Mr. Nowell—he must be much better

to have ventured out, and down here on a day like this."

'Of course it was no place of mine to make any remarks. I held my tongue, and went to my own quarters, meditating a little on what had happened. I met the venerable man face to face; he was buttoned up in huge furs and overcoats. I suppose his poor little mummy of a person was stowed away somewhere inside them; and as long as the spirit continues to animate it, that mummy will have the power to make everyone connected with it uncomfortable. He was leaning on the arm of Smith, his man, and condescended to give me a nod and a grunt of recognition. His errand, whatever it might be, was cut short by a paroxysm of bronchitic coughing, which left him gasping and almost fainting. We nearly carried him to his carriage, a hired brougham, which had brought him down; and he was driven away home. How he

survives these fits of coughing is more than I can understand. I fancy he will go very soon—may it be before he has had time to accomplish the mischief which Peril affirms he is plotting !





CHAPTER XII.

LE ROI EST MORT.

LITTLE more than a week later, Mrs. Robson was back at her post, her sister having, as she observed, without intending either reproach or satire, 'disappointed them' for the second time, and deferred her demise until some future day. Mrs. Robson merely used an expression which had been common and correct in her youth, but, in a measure, she actually was disappointed. If Mrs. Hepburn, the sister in question, had indeed and veritably died—if Mrs. Robson could have come back in triumphant crape, and with the black-

edged handkerchief of a mourner before her eyes—she would at least have felt that she had left her post at Great North Street for a solid and tangible reason. But, as a matter of fact, her sister had got better, and Mrs. Robson felt very much as if she had been decoyed away from her charge on false pretences—as if she need never have left him in Peril's careless keeping. She had insisted on having bulletins as to his health, as often as she could extract them from the young lady, who performed her office in a very perfunctory manner. Mrs. Robson had heard from her four times, billets, on each occasion, as terse and concise as a telegraphic despatch. The first had said :

‘Grandpapa says he is better than he has been for years. He had a close carriage yesterday, and was out driving for some time.’

Peril omitted — purposely, and by her grandfather's orders—to state that this drive

had been to town, on business, the nature of which he had not confided to her.

Despatch No. 2 said :

‘Grandpapa has got a little touch of his bronchitis again, but his appetite keeps good, and he does not intend to go out. You are not to trouble, he says.’

Despatch No. 3, sent two days later, informed Mrs. Robson :

‘Grandpapa’s cough is worse. I sent for the doctor. He says he is to keep in one temperature, and take every care.’

It will be imagined into what a fever Mrs. Robson was thrown by the last of these despatches. She resolved to return to Darkingford, and her resolution was only confirmed by the last bulletin, received on the morning of her departure from her sister’s :

‘Grandpapa really very ill. The doctor says, if you can leave Mrs. Hepburn, you had better come here at once.’

Trains, cabs, and every other method of locomotion were all too slow for Mrs. Robson on that anxious day. Towards dusk she arrived at Great North Street, having worked herself up into a frenzy of doubt and apprehension. Peril came towards her in the hall, and was greeted with the announcement :

‘I knew what would be the result of my absence. What on earth have you been doing to let your poor, dear grandfather get so ill? He must have been dreadfully neglected.’

Extreme anxiety and irritation could alone have caused Mrs. Robson to say a thing like this, for one of the servants standing by was Smith, Mr. Nowell’s man, who observed at once, in answer to her words :

‘Mr. Nowell has had the usual attentions, ma’am. When Miss Nowell begged him to stop in, he rang the bell and ordered me to send for a brougham. I think you’ll own

that my master's orders in his own house must be attended to.'

'Oh, I meant nothing ; it is only most distressing that it should have happened,' said Mrs. Robson hurriedly.

Smith was an old and confidential retainer, and it was by no means to her interest to quarrel with him.

Peril, who had listened with supreme indifference, now observed, reassuringly :

'I consider him very ill indeed, and I think you ought to send for Hugh at once.'

Mrs. Robson, carrying her investigations into the sick-room, was not encouraged by what she found. The patient was indeed very weak and prostrate, and torn by a cough which could only be subdued by means of opiates. He just opened his eyes when she spoke to him, but scarcely took any notice of her. The doctor coming in soon after her arrival, she held a hurried consultation with

him, and it was decided that it would be better to send for Hugh. It was still early in the evening, and a telegram was despatched, which might bring him home almost before morning.

In the black and pitchy darkness of an early February morning, Nowell returned to his home. The complaint had made considerable progress, even in the hours which had elapsed since Mrs. Robson's return. The doctor was there, and was remaining there till some change should take place either for the better or the worse, and he held out no prospect of its being for the better.

The long hours of the day dragged on, and the watch was continued by the old man's bedside. The house was very quiet. The sick man lay with dulled senses, in a kind of trance, breathing—but only breathing.

One or two knocks came to the door—one

or two persons called to inquire after the invalid. Amongst them was Paul Lawford. He was told that Miss Nowell had said, if he called, she wanted to speak to him; and he was thereupon ushered into the library, where she had spoken to him on the night when Mr. Nowell had sent for him. She very soon came down to him. Her face was white, and her hands were cold. Everything in her appearance betrayed the state of high nervous tension and agonized suspense in which her whole being was. It seemed to Paul that since he had seen her, she had visibly wasted and dwindled. His own handsome, indifferent-looking face was a little paler than usual, as he saw her, and felt the sense of fascination which she exercised over him, deepen and strengthen almost as he stood there.

‘You want to see me, Miss Nowell?’

‘I dared not come to you again the other

night. I was afraid of what you might tell me. But now, anything is better than suspense. Tell me, Mr. Lawford, what did he say ?’

‘Nothing,’ said Paul. ‘At least, nothing that could be called suspicious, or dangerous. To tell the truth, I cannot think that your theory was the correct one. He asked me far more about Mr. Hankinson and myself than about Hugh. He even went into details,’ added the young man, with the dawn of a smile, ‘about the number of fires kept burning at the office. I fancy he wanted to see if he could make a spy of me ; useful in the matter of checking off small economies of that kind.’

Peril almost groaned. ‘So much the worse,’ she said. ‘He has already made up his mind. Don’t think I am quite mad, Mr. Lawford. I only wish I were. Hugh has come back—grandpapa is dying. They don’t

tell me so, but I know it quite well. Very soon we shall know what it is—I shall, that is—my punishment, you know, that I spoke of. If it is very bad, perhaps it will turn my brain; and oh, what a blessing that would be!

‘Don’t talk like that! Don’t make the worst of everything,’ said Lawford, feeling his heart ache at the spectacle of her white face, and great fixed, sleepless-looking eyes.

‘There’s no one else to whom I can say it,’ she replied, blankly. ‘But I won’t trouble you with it any more. I must not stay here, either. Good-night! I am glad you came.’

She bowed her head to him, and glided away. Lawford departed, full of thought.

The next person who called said, if everyone else was busy, could he see Miss Nowell? It was Mr. Hankinson, and again the interview took place in the library.

‘Pardon my troubling you, Miss Nowell.

I should like to know exactly how poor Mr. Nowell is.'

'He is dying, I suppose,' she replied, in a hard voice. 'I don't know how ill he is, or how soon he will go, but he is dying.'

'Dear, dear! Terrible, awful!' said Han-kinson, wiping his brow, and panting.

Peril looked at him with curiosity mingled with contempt. Was it possible that he cared for Mr. Nowell? Was he attached to him? No; she put that idea out of her head instantly. Then he was afraid that things might be altered; that he might lose his post—that was it; all for greed, like everything else that everyone did. She felt inclined to laugh ungenially, when he resumed:

'And how are the others? How do they bear up? How are you yourself, Miss Nowell?'

'I suppose he thinks it is best to be polite

all round,' she thought, mentally shrugging her shoulders, while she replied aloud :

'I am perfectly well, thank you; and so are the others, so far as I know. I suppose it was only what was to be expected in the case of a very old man like him. People cannot live for ever.'

'No, no! You are quite right. "The common lot of all." Yes; quite true. But there is always a certain solemnity,' murmured Mr. Hankinson, moving to take his departure.

Peril followed him out of the room, and stood in the hall while he let himself out. Turning to go back again into the library, where she sat all alone, something, some inner feeling, sent a little shudder through her; something seemed to draw her eyes upwards, and leaning over the banisters on one of the upper landings, she dimly saw a face—a pale, rigid face: its eyes alone she saw with any distinctness, and they were

fixed upon her. She shrugged her shoulders visibly and openly, lingered a moment, and then returned to the library.

‘Does she think I am hatching plots with Mr. Lawford and Hankinson? It is what she would do herself, I suppose, if necessary.’

* * * * *

It was several hours later, on the same night. Peril and Mrs. Robson had made some pretence of taking a meal together. Hugh and the doctor were still upstairs. When supper was over, the two women repaired to the drawing-room, where the fire was burning and the candles were lighted, and all was orderly and still, for the room had scarcely been entered that day. Mrs. Robson, in her black stuff dress, which she had never taken off since her return, with her grey face looking greyer and more rigid than ever, seated herself in an easy-chair at one side of the fireplace, folded her hands on

her lap, and remained motionless. She had not even the softening grace of her usual white lace-cap, but had her flat, smooth, iron-grey hair uncovered; and who is there who cannot testify to the hardening effect of such an unfinished toilette in the case of an un-beautiful elderly woman? Peril, since her interviews with Lawford and Mr. Hankinson, had been upstairs, and put on her usual evening costume: a gown, old and soft, of red, oriental silk, which gown she was accustomed to wear when no one came to the house, and when she was not going out herself—that is to say, nearly always. It was an old, and by no means a splendid garment, but its colour, and its folds when placed upon her person, made the picture a remarkable one. She had made this toilette half out of a sort of resentment—they had not chosen to give her any accurate news of her grandfather's state; no one had spoken

to her of him ; they had not summoned her to his room, or treated her as if she had any interest in the matter—she would therefore behave as if there were nothing unusual going on. Hence her appearance at the supper-table in her old red silk gown, and a certain careless contempt in her looks and tones.

She did not sit down when they got into the drawing-room, but paced restlessly up and down its ample space.

‘I do wish you would be still,’ observed Mrs. Robson, in a tone of indignant remonstrance. ‘An occasion like this ought to be improved—it ought to be devoted to prayer and meditation.’

‘Prayer and meditation are for the closet, in my opinion ; for the times when one is alone, not for the drawing-room immediately after supper!’ retorted Peril, continuing her restless walk. ‘Go there if you want

to meditate ; I am going to walk about here !

As a matter of fact, she was in such a state of nervous excitement that it would have been impossible for her to sit still for two minutes ; but that was the last thing she would have confessed to Mrs. Robson.

‘ Pray insult me in every possible way ; I have learnt by now that it is what I have to expect from you. But it must not hinder me from doing my duty by you ; and I should not be fulfilling that if I did not ask you what, in the name of wonder, induced you to dress yourself up in that way on a night like this ?’

‘ I am dressed as I usually do dress. In what way is to-night different from other nights ?’

‘ Instead of sitting still, and waiting for the summons we may at any moment receive.’

‘ I thought it was grandpapa who expected the summons.’

‘Your levity revolts me. Instead of behaving decently even, you literally flaunt your contempt for your poor dear grandfather in everyone’s face ; first giving interviews to young men in the afternoon——’

‘Mr. Hankinson is indeed a dangerously fascinating young man.’

‘And in the evening dressing yourself up as if for some festivity. It is indecent.’

Peril did not take the trouble to be angry, all she said was :

‘You talk like a hypocrite, and you act like one. I am not sorry, and I am not pretending that I am ; you are glad, and you pretend to be sorry. I wonder which is the worst ?’

She laughed disagreeably.

Mrs. Robson made no reply. She resolved to let Peril say what she liked, while she would maintain a dignified silence. This might have been an available method of

procedure if Peril had confined herself to saying ; when she went on to do, matters became more complicated. She observed :

‘ I cannot bear this horrible hush and silence ; it will drive me wild ! ’

With which she went to the piano and opened it.

‘ Peril ! ’ came from Mrs. Robson, in a shrieked-out whisper, discordant enough to have elicited an answering scream from her hearer ; ‘ are you perfectly mad ? Close the instrument at once ! ’

In the days when Mrs. Robson had had her school, before she had become Mr. Nowell’s housekeeper, a piano was always called an ‘ instrument ; ’ and it was considered more elegant and less abrupt to say ‘ close ’ than ‘ shut. ’ ‘ Close the instrument ’ was, therefore, archaic genteel boarding-school language for ‘ Shut the piano. ’

‘ They would never hear me if I sat down

and played the loudest thing I know, which I take to be the arrangement of "Home, sweet Home" which I was taught at Rio, to keep up the feeling of family affection in my heart.'

Mrs. Robson's agitation was so great that she actually rose from her chair, marched up to the 'instrument,' and with a trembling hand closed it. In doing so she let the lid fall from sheer nervousness; and it went down with a loud clap, causing every string to resound and send portentous echoes all through the room.

'There!' said Peril, smiling disagreeably; 'who wants a lecture now for making a noise?'

Mrs. Robson retreated, with what dignity she might, to her place by the fire, and said nothing; and Peril, after giving a look round, observed:

'Well, I may not play, and I suppose sing-

ing also comes under the head sinful, because they are both noisy, evidently. You asked me just now if I was quite mad. I'm not yet, but I soon shall be if I don't find something to do. I shall dance, because that is not noisy ; at least, it need not be.'

'I forbid you to do anything so *disgraceful* !' said Mrs. Robson, thoroughly roused, and more appalled by this last suggestion than by either of the preceding ones.

Without paying the least attention to her, Peril cleared a space in the middle of the large room, and observed, indifferently :

'Turn your back to me, and then you cannot see ; and I'll engage that you shall not hear anything.'

With which she placed herself in the centre of the space she had made, and, balancing her hands on her hips, began to sway from side to side with a slight move-

ment of the feet, which presently grew more marked and rapid till it broke into a dance—impromptu, inspired. Anyone not knowing anything of the circumstances, must have been fascinated and bound to the spot to watch the enchantment of her rapid movements. She had promised Mrs. Robson that there should be no noise, and, save for the ceaseless rustling of her silken gown, there would have been none. It accompanied her movements just as an unceasing murmur accompanies the break of the wave upon the shore ; and the one motion was as harmonious, as rhythmic, as perfect as the other ; only in the breaking of waves—quiet and regular waves, that is—there is no passion ; nor was there any at first in her movements, but presently a fever, or fury seemed to take possession of her, and without any violence, any abruptness, or discordance, every movement became intensified and accentuated.

She had forgotten utterly that she was not alone. With her head poised, her eyes fixed upon her own twinkling feet, except when they were now and then raised to flash a glance round the room, she continued to whirl, and float, and lightly spring, every moment growing more lost in her pastime, more passionate and more dramatic in her gestures. Her cheeks were flushed with a slight bright carmine ; her brilliant lips were slightly parted now and then with a strange smile, showing dazzling teeth gleaming for a moment. Not often, in this our decorous age, do we get so plain a glimpse, at any rate in our better-class womenkind, of 'the tiger and the ape,' whose elements have not yet been bred clean out of us, let optimists say what they will. She looked sinister with all her magic beauty. One would more readily have compared her to a panther or a cat disporting itself in its own wild way, with as

much of fierceness and thirst for prey as of healthy longing for physical movement, than to aught human.

It was a remarkable sight ; and Mrs. Agatha Robson, instead of turning her back upon it, as she had been recommended to do, and as it had perhaps been desirable for her peace of mind and her soul's health that she should have done, sat and gazed at it—scandalized at first, and intending to interfere and remonstrate, but, as time went on, watching the exhibition with repulsion, and presently with horror and disgust. Of course it would have been as reasonable to ask British philistinism to understand, say, Irish peasant idiosyncrasies, as to expect Mrs. Robson to comprehend, even dimly, the nature of the girl. She clasped her hands and looked on, her face growing first crimson, then pale, with suppressed feeling. Never, in all her narrow existence, had her inmost principles and

prejudices been stirred and roused as they were now.

At first, she waited for the dance to end, meaning to bid Peril leave her presence as soon as the exhibition should be over ; then, as she saw no prospect of its termination, she quivered and trembled, and watched the flying feet and the swaying figure with the fire and fierceness which did away with voluptuousness, and gave to it all a sinister fascination which Mrs. Robson felt, though she felt it as something which scorched her ; as if a red-hot hail of something diabolical and abominable were raining upon her. The passion of the dance was at its height when the elder lady rose from her chair, planted herself straight in the dancer's path, grasped her arm, and in a half-choked voice gasped out :

‘ Give over, you wretched girl !’

Shocked, arrested suddenly, Peril stood

still, quivering from head to foot like a nervous horse before something it does not understand. Her eyes flashed upon Mrs. Robson, and she said in a panting voice :

‘ Loose me, stupid woman ! Do you want me to do you some harm ?’

‘ Do you know what you are doing ?’ said the other, shaking her slightly. ‘ You want a bucketful of cold water pouring over you to bring you to your senses. I always knew you were wild and flighty, now I see that you are *bad* !’

‘ Bad !’ cried Peril, in a fury. ‘ Take care what you say ! I can be bad if I like ; and if you cross me I will look at you with the evil eye. You had best keep to your proper place, and receive nothing more dangerous than my contempt !’

As she spoke she bent her head forward, stooping it towards Mrs. Robson, and her eyes, face, all of her, seemed like one flame of

passionate anger. They stood in the very centre of the room, and, after her words, they were still for a moment, looking into each other's eyes. Mrs. Robson, strong in the sanctity of Ebenezer, not much liking the threat of the evil eye, but filled with loathing for the nature of her who had uttered it; Peril, on her part, filled with wild passion, plunged her dark gaze into Mrs. Robson's light one, and wondered why she could not smite her down on the spot, and slay her with her look. But that it is not the fashion for young Englishwomen to carry stilettoes about with them, it might have fared ill with Mrs. Robson just then.

During the moment in which they stood thus the door was opened, and Mrs. Robson, looking up, saw Hugh. He was pale and grave, and there was a look of surprise in his eyes as they rested upon the group in the middle of the room. Mrs. Robson, forgetting

everything else, turned to him, exclaiming in an eager and yet hushed tone :

‘ Hugh ! what——’

‘ Yes,’ said Nowell, ‘ he is dead.’

Peril, folding her arms, stood motionless, and made no observation. Mrs. Robson, yielding to the reaction which rushed over her after her unwonted excitement, fell back into the nearest chair, covering her face with her hands, and sobbing violently. Peril looked down at her. Her lip curled, and there was unspeakable contempt in her glance.

Nowell saw, of course, that something had gone wrong between them, but he asked no questions. He looked at Peril, raising his eyebrows in an inquiring manner. She replied by a shrug of her shoulders, which might mean anything or nothing ; and then, without deigning further look, or any word at all, walked out of the room.

Despite her loud sobbing, Mrs. Robson

was conscious of the other's departure. She raised her head instantly ; her tears dried as if by magic, and, looking at Nowell, she said :

‘ Hugh, she has done us a mischief while we have both been away, and that is why she behaves so insolently.’

‘ Don't, Aunt Agatha,’ he said, in a voice of extreme distaste. ‘ If my grandfather had never had a penny it would have been better for us all, I often think ; at least, don't let us wrangle about it before the breath has fairly left his body.’

She was silenced, but firmly convinced of the truth of her theory.

‘ I should not wonder if she knows every word of his will, and is looking forward to triumphing over us,’ she said to herself ; ‘ but she shall not do that with impunity.’



CHAPTER XIII.

THE DEAD HAND STRIKES.

EARLY on the following day Mr. Nowell's solicitors were communicated with — an old-established and well-known firm, of the very highest respectability. They sent one of their confidential clerks to the house, with the information that they had drawn up a will for Mr. Nowell—who had never revealed any matter of this nature to his family—some three years before, and that, so far as they knew, that was his last and only testament.

At this point Smith, the man who had waited upon Mr. Nowell for so many years,

came forward and said, no doubt that was quite true ; but that he knew Mr. Nowell had made a new will since then—the other day, in fact—and that it had not been drawn up by Messrs. Carbury and Parsons, but by another firm. He—Smith—had accompanied Mr. Nowell to their office on the day when he had visited his own warehouse, and had sat waiting outside in the carriage while Mr. Nowell had had an interview of more than an hour with one of the principals of the firm. When they drove away, his master had observed to him that he thought he had made all secure now ; for he had punished all those who had wronged him, and had so arranged that the self-interest of everyone else would cause them to do their utmost to fulfil the conditions of his will. Three days later the will had come from Mr. Barclay's, this second solicitor's ; and Mr. Nowell, after reading it, had caused Smith,

and Mrs. Fellowes, the old cook-housekeeper, to witness it ; and had then told Smith where to find his old one, and had caused him to burn it in his presence and that of Mrs. Fellowes.

‘ Where did he put the new one ? ’ inquired the head-clerk from Mr. Carbury’s office.

‘ He bade me lock it up in his secretary, which was in his room. I did so. The key always hung to his watch-chain, and I expect you will find it there now.’

The watch-chain was produced, and the key was found hanging to it. Hugh, accompanied by Mrs. Robson, the clerk, and Smith, went to the bedroom, opened the drawer, and took from it the will, which he delivered over to the clerk to take to Mr. Carbury.

In two days more the grave had closed over the remains of a hard and loveless old man ; unhonoured by those nearest to him in his life, and unmourned by them at his death.

Not a tear was shed for him. A decent gravity was maintained, but no one ventured to breathe the hint of a regret for him. The following was a small one. Nowell and Mrs. Robson were present. Peril had absolutely refused to leave the house or her room. Ever since the old man's death she had looked ill, white, and haggard. Since hearing of the discovery of this lately-made will she had not addressed a word to anyone, but had shut herself up, dumb, miserable, and wretched, awaiting the end in silent, voiceless suspense. Her fear was, lest her hasty and passionate words should have caused Mr. Nowell to do something detrimental to Hugh's interests, should by any means have deprived him of even a portion of what should be his. Further than that, her thoughts did not go, nor her fears.

Hankinson, the manager, was also of the funeral company; and Paul Lawford, out of

his regard for Hugh, presented himself. One or two distant relatives of the late Mrs. Nowell were there ; and at Hugh's special instigation an invitation had been sent to Peril's only near relative, her uncle, Mr. Wistar, of Wiswell in Yorkshire. She had given her cousin a look of gratitude, and had murmured, ' Thank you.'

Mr. Wistar had declined to be present at the funeral. But he had written a bluff kind of little note to Peril, in which he had said that he bore her no ill-will for the insolence and ill-treatment which he and other members of his family had in days gone by received from Mr. Nowell. She had not been answerable for that conduct, not having been born at that time into this distressful world. If circumstances made her wishful of changing her home, he was ready and willing to take her in ; but she must remember that his was a homely house, with simple ways, which he

would not alter for anyone in the world. Rich or poor, she would be welcome to him as his kinswoman ; but, rich or poor, if she came to him, she must take him as she found him, and he was—her uncle, George Wistar.

She had paid little heed to this epistle, being wholly absorbed in nearer and darker considerations than those of a desirable place of residence. She let the funeral party go ; and while they were away she was shut up in her room, on her knees most of the time, feeling her heart failing and fainting within her, wishing that the wretched day were only over.

When they had come back she was sent for, and found that they had assembled in the drawing-room—Mr. Carbury himself, Hugh, Hankinson, and Mrs. Robson. As she went in she felt dizzy and uncertain, and the whole place seemed to whirl and float around her. Only Mrs. Robson's face she seemed to see

clearly, and the stony look with which it was turned towards her. Her cousin, seeing how white and ghastly she looked, stepped forward, took her hand, placed her in a chair, and whispered that there was nothing to be alarmed about. She looked at him dumbly, and shook her head. He did not know what had happened just before that second will had been made ; no one knew but herself and Paul Lawford. A faint wish crossed her mind that Lawford could have been there. He alone would have been able to understand, if any catastrophe took place, that the blow struck her as hard as it struck anyone. She passively sank into the chair to which Hugh had led her, and waited.

Then Mr. Carbury's voice was heard, saying he had a painful duty to perform : he had read this will carefully, he did not wish to read it through now ; he would give them an outline of it, and they could go into it at

their leisure. It had surprised and grieved him, and he considered it wrong and unjust ; he was sure, too, that Mr. Nowell must have had the same conviction himself, since he had given them, his old friends and men of business, no chance of saying anything in the matter, but had gone elsewhere to have it drawn up unknown to them. By this time Peril felt as if she were turning to stone, but stone with brains, and nerves, and infinite capacity for being tortured.

This will, then, said Mr. Carbury, made the following principal provisions. The testator's whole estate was left to his granddaughter, Peril Nowell, with the condition that she did not marry before attaining her twenty-fifth year. Should she violate this condition, she received a fortune of fifty thousand pounds, and the estate went to Hugh. Robert Hankinson, the testator appointed executor, in co-operation with

Peril herself, when she had attained her legal majority. The said Robert Hankinson, his heirs, executors, and assigns, were to carry on the business in the interest of the said Peril Nowell until her marriage after her twenty-fifth year; due provision was made for its being carried on after that event, or in case she did not marry, and elaborate instructions as to how, in the case of this marriage, the property was to be strictly settled upon herself and her children. A sum of eight hundred a year was set aside for her maintenance until she attained her majority, and Mr. Hankinson was appointed her guardian; but her choice of residence was free, subject to his approval. The greatest care and elaboration had evidently been spent upon these arrangements, which all tended to show that Mr. Nowell had decided to make Peril his heiress; and that though he wished her to marry and have a family, which should

perpetuate his name—for he had provided for that also—any man she married was to take the name of Nowell before his own—though he wished this, he was also anxious that it should not be done hurriedly or ill-advisedly ; hence this elaborate provision against her marrying too early, or being enabled to bestow her fortune rashly upon any mere adventurer. His contempt for the business capacities and common-sense of womankind showed out strongly here. To his grandson, Hugh, he bequeathed one hundred pounds a year for his life, and a clerkship or other post at the works, with a salary of the same amount, so long as he chose to remain there. To Mrs. Agatha Robson, his cousin, an annuity for her life of four hundred pounds.

‘There are other things,’ pursued Mr. Carbury : ‘legacies to old servants, and matters of that kind, which I need not now go into ; but——’

He was stopped by a slight movement and bustle which here took place. He looked up and round about him, and saw Peril rising from her chair, but holding herself up by the arm of it, as if she could not stand alone—white, even livid, gasping for breath, and looking from one to the other with wild strained eyes. She seemed to try to speak, but failed in the effort. She held out one hand towards Hugh, raising it as if expostulating against what she had heard. Hugh was not looking at her ; he held a paper in one hand, which he beat upon the other in a measured manner, and his face was set ; he was trying to look as if he did not care, and, as was to be expected, he failed.

Mr. Carbury had never felt so uncomfortable in his life, and his happiness was not increased by what now took place. While Peril was thus half standing, half holding on to the arm of her chair, with horror and

speechless dismay written upon every line of her face and attitude, Mrs. Robson, who had also risen, strode across the room to the girl, took her by the shoulders, and said :

‘ Did I not say from the first that you were a snare and a danger to this house, you bad, vile young woman ? This has all happened while we were away—while my back was turned, and that of your cousin, who has ever showed you a kindness you little deserved. Since you came under this roof he has treated you as a brother would treat his dear sister, and you have rewarded him like the monster that you are. Wretch ! I hope every penny will be cursed to you if you succeed in keeping it !’

No one could stop her, no one could summon up presence of mind to interfere while she said these words. They were drawn from her by her bitter hatred for

Peril, quite as much as by the loss and evaporation of the dream which she had cherished for the last eighteen years—that dream in which Hugh became rich and prosperous, and the sun began to shine for them all. As she hissed out her accusations Hugh too had risen, but stood there tongue-tied; and she said her say, and then glared into Peril's face with a fury which she did not attempt to control, and with the heavy weight of her iron hands pressing down upon the girl's shoulders.

Peril shrank, stooped, bowed under the pressure at first, and then, with a sudden exertion of strength and will, pushed Mrs. Robson away from her, and turned, with hands outstretched and agonized countenance, to Hugh, crying, in a voice which she had found at last, but which had in it no sound of her own very voice :

‘ Hugh ! you do not believe her ? Curse

me if you like for ever having come here, but say you do not believe her! Hugh! oh, Hugh!

Her voice broke into a cry, half sob, half wail. Claspng her hands together, she fell upon her knees before him, faintly repeating his name, and looking into his face with hunted eyes.

They probably all understood. Such agony was scarcely commensurate with ordinary regard, or even with the calm love of sister for brother. Nowell himself at last saw—the truth flashed upon him in a gleam like lightning; but the blow had fallen so suddenly—the thing was so bewildering that he could only stare down at her, and say :

‘Peril, I——’

‘*I steal from you!*’ she said, taking hold of his hands. ‘I, who would have gone bare-foot to save you an hour’s unhappiness! Plot to cheat the only person who ever spoke

kindly to me since I came here! I—why, I love you better, better——’

She stopped, as if choked. Hankinson was looking on, his lips twitching, his face working. The will, so far as he was concerned, was providential; if he had been asked to name the conditions most favourable to his own circumstances, he could have devised none more perfectly suited to his needs. Bald-headed Mr. Carbury pulled off his spectacles, and wiped his eyes, and said to himself:

‘Dear, dear! Poor young thing! What a romance! But of course they will make it all up in the right way. It may be for the best, after all; and I hope they *will* cheat the old blackguard in the end.’

But Peril, fulfilling nature’s law, which says that human body and soul may sustain but a certain amount of suffering and not succumb, had sunk unconsciously to the floor

—first her head drooped over Nowell's hands, then her grasp of them loosed; she fell together, and forgot her wretchedness for a little space.

'Aunt,' said he, looking at Mrs. Robson with a sense almost of relief—for it was so much easier to know what to do with a fainting woman than what to say to the rival who had supplanted him—'help me! Let us put her on the sofa.'

'I hope I may be palsied if I ever look at her or speak to her again!' said the woman, deliberately and vindictively, and she turned away and walked out of the room.

'Good heavens! That is a very hard, bad woman,' observed Mr. Carbury, while Hankinson, in silence, stepped up to help Hugh. They placed her upon the sofa, and Hankinson rang the bell for assistance. Mr. Carbury whispered to Nowell that as nothing more could be done now, he would take the will

with him to his office, where anyone could see it who wished to do so, and so picked up his hat and departed, with a sense of deep relief in getting out of the miserable house. Servants came in, restoratives were applied to the fainting girl, and all too soon, her tragic eyes opened again upon what was for her a tragic world.

* * * * *

When she returned to consciousness, there was no one with her except old Mrs. Fellowes and a housemaid. When they saw her eyes open, they murmured something expressive of their satisfaction at her recovery, and Peril gazed with blank eyes around her, and at last sat up. Fortunately for herself, she was at the moment too faint, bewildered and confused, to fairly take in the full dreariness of her situation, and the irony of her present condition. She was young; she was eminently beautiful, and she was, it seemed, to

be eminently rich : this is a combination of gifts, the possessor of which seldom finds him or herself without friends in abundance ; but Peril was here alone, with two hired servants, who had done what they could for her, probably without feeling much interest in her ; and, as far as she knew, there was not another soul in the world on whom she had any more right to depend—on whose regard she had any reason to build more confidently than on that of these two women. She was aware of this, dimly ; it tintured her feelings, but she did not actually realize it ; and it was well for her.

‘ Have I been fainting, or something ? ’ she asked vaguely, as she half sat up.

‘ Yes, you have, miss ; you’ve been in a regular swoon ; but you’re better now, I think,’ said Mrs. Fellowes, more respectfully than she had ever spoken to her before. Mrs. Robson, marching out of the drawing-

room, beside herself with rage, had met Smith, had stopped before him, and, having now no reason to be either civil or forbearing with him, had told him roundly that, when he took his master to town that morning, he had done the worst day's work of his whole life; and she had then and there told him that Hugh, whom they all adored, was, so to speak, cut off with a penny, and that Peril, to whom they were perfectly indifferent, neither loving nor hating, nor in any way sympathizing with her, was heiress to everything. Smith had lost no time in communicating the news to his fellow-servants, and when Hugh had left the two women with his cousin, they had been perfectly well aware of the now reversed positions of the young man and the young woman.

She was silent for a moment, looking forlorn and desolate.

‘Where are they all?’ she asked.

The women looked at each other. They understood. They knew the feeling of Mrs. Robson for Peril, and they, for their part, were disposed to be disgusted at the fact that 'poor Mr. Hugh' had been so badly treated.

'Where's Hugh?' she asked. 'Where is my cousin?'

'I don't know, I'm sure, miss,' said Mrs. Fellowes.

'I saw him go into his room,' said the housemaid; 'and Mr. Hankinson left a message that he'd call and inquire how you was to-night, and you could see him or not, as you liked.'

'Mr. Hankinson?' said Peril, passing her hand over her eyes. 'Oh yes, I remember now.'

Mrs. Fellowes, who was a kindly old soul, felt some pity for her, and interposed with a well-meant suggestion:

'Now, Miss Nowell, if you'd take my

advice, you'll go and lie down on your bed a bit, and I'll make you a cup of tea, and you'll get some rest, and it will do you good.'

'I don't want any rest,' said Peril wearily. 'What have I been doing to tire myself? I must see Mr. Hugh.'

There was a pause. At last :

'Indeed, miss, I don't think Mr. Hugh looked like seeing anyone,' said the housemaid reluctantly.

Peril covered her face with her hands, swaying to and fro, and moaning a little. They all knew about it. There was no secret in it. It was no longer a hidden fear, deep down in her own heart, and scarcely whispered by her most inner consciousness to her most inner soul ; it was an accomplished fact, blazoned abroad, and its effects had already begun to be observed by these servants. As for Hugh, perhaps he was sitting in his room now, thinking over her

treachery, and wondering what he had done to deserve it. This idea was absolute torture to her.

‘Don’t you think he would see *me*?’ she said, clasping her hands, and looking appealingly at the girl.

This question showed the measure of the depth of hopelessness, misery and friendlessness to which she had sunk. With all her wild temper, she had never been discourteous or unkind to servants; but she had always kept aloof from them, never chatting with them, or unbending, and when she turned to this young woman now, and asked her this question, it was a sign that she had sunk very low indeed in misery and despair.

‘I can’t tell, miss, indeed,’ said Hannah, looking embarrassed.

Then Peril seemed to gather her scattered wits together a little. She dismissed Mrs. Fellowes, and sent Hannah with a note to

Hugh's room, asking if he would see her some time to-day, and begging him to name an hour. The girl brought back the answer—half-past six; and as it was now after four, Peril went to her room, resolved there to wait, and take counsel with herself as to how she should best approach the subject of the will with Hugh. As she sat there alone, she felt the full weight of her youth, her ignorance, and her utter unacquaintance with the world and its ways. Not knowing anything about legal matters, she could not tell whether what she desired to do could be easily carried through; she was all in the dark; she must painfully and laboriously find her way out of the maze into which she had got. She felt this keenly, but she also felt a resolution which nothing could shake, and which came to her with healing and bracing on its wings—a resolution not to submit to the conditions that had been laid down for her—not to carry

the burden which threatened to break her down. Without exactly reasoning it out, she had the sense that she was in a false position, from which no one but herself could extricate herself. She intended so to extricate herself—how, she did not know ; but she intended first to try whether Hugh would not help her to do it, as that would be incomparably the shortest and easiest way out of the dilemma. If he would work with her, and she would use every art of eloquence and persuasion which she possessed, to incline him to it—well and good ; her triumph over adversity would be speedy, and her peace of mind quickly restored. If he would not—well, the process would be longer, more complicated, more difficult, but none the less certain in the end. She had great confidence in Hugh—in his kindness, generosity, and common-sense.

By the time that half-past six arrived, and

she went down to the library to meet him, she felt actually more hopeful, not less so, than she had done for a long time ; and this was because she had at last an object towards which to walk, and an end in life to accomplish.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE COUSINS.

PERIL was the first to be at the rendezvous, but Hugh did not tarry long behind her. When he came in, she was standing with her hand on the mantelpiece, looking eagerly towards the door. She had been living a vivid, palpitating life during these last two hours; her brain was excited; she had forgotten by now the things she had said in her first agony on hearing the course which events had taken. Not so Hugh. His thoughts also had been very busy during this last two hours, and his resolutions too; his resentment was running

high and hot, and his ideas as to what course it would be becoming for him to take were, perhaps, somewhat grandiose in the first flush of his anger, excitement, and disappointment. He looked very handsome as he came in, with a touch of anger and defiance on his dark face, and a reserved, aggrieved expression in his eyes.

Peril caught her breath, as he came nearer to her, and she realized that her only friend was now, if not her enemy, estranged from her, exasperated with her—and justly so. The dearest things she had—Hugh, and Hugh's affection—were slipping away from her; she seemed suddenly to understand that if they were to be kept, it would be by no small effort. This was the same face which had ever looked kindly and indulgently upon her; and this the person whose voice had always been uplifted in her behalf. Her own eyes were melting away in tears, and her

voice was unsteady, as she went forward a little, with hands outstretched.

‘Hugh, this is very good of you to come to me—very, very good.’

Hugh did not respond to her half-timid, half-impetuous movement—did not take her hand, scarcely looked at her, save with a fleeting glance which had a flash of anger in it, but replied :

‘You said you wanted to see me, and I thought it best to get it over at once. It can’t be a very pleasant interview, anyhow.’

‘No, it cannot, because I have wronged you, and that is dreadful for us both ; but infinitely worse for me than you—just now, at any rate, because it all depends upon your goodwill how things will end. I want to tell you something first of all. I want you to know the very worst that I have done, Hugh.’

He looked at her in some surprise, and

she told him, in short, broken words, of what had happened after her quarrel with him—of all that had passed between Mr. Nowell and herself. Hugh's face grew darker and darker as he listened; and Peril, in spite of the encouragements which she mentally addressed to herself, felt her heart sinking lower and lower; her spirit growing fainter and fainter each moment. She began to have an inkling that her scheme was Utopian and unpractical, and that perhaps Hugh would not see it in the light in which she wished him to see it. Neither his look nor his tone at present were propitious. But it was part of her purpose to paint herself as black as she could, and she did so.

‘He made this new will after that,’ she said, deliberately, ‘and I suppose he made it because of what I had told him about you.’

Hugh was sitting beside the table, balancing the tips of his fingers together, and looking

down at his hands with a frown—a very black and angry frown. His passion never took the form of sullenness, but it was always fierce while it lasted. He now glanced up at her, and there was strong resentment in his expression.

‘Then, Peril, you played me a scurvy trick; you knew what he felt on that subject. I hid nothing from you. I had taken you into my confidence. I was in your power; and you went and did this, behind my back. You just blasted my character; you said nothing about Hankinson, or he would have visited his resentment upon him too. I must say that, for a fit of passion, there is something peculiarly cold-blooded about it. After all, Aunt Agatha was not so far out in what she said.’

‘Oh, I know, I know,’ she said, in a stifled voice. ‘I can’t say anything. I just went and said the worst of *you* that I could—I—

But what's the use of saying ? you may ask me—I ought to *do*. And Hugh, if you will help me, I will do—not talk.'

'Do what ? I really don't see what there is to be done, Peril. If you had only abstained from doing, on this auspicious occasion that you speak of——'

'Oh, Hugh !' she began, in a tone of sharp anguish, almost of anger, as if she would have resented his words ; and then, suddenly recollecting herself, she went on, humbly enough, and dejectedly, 'I forgot. Say what you like. You have a right to say hard things if ever anybody had ; and I have no right to complain, whatever you might say. Reproach me, Hugh ! I will not utter a word till you have done, for I deserve it all.'

Angry and bitter and exasperated though he was, it gave him an uncomfortable feeling to see Peril standing there and behaving with

such unwonted meekness ; but the strong consciousness of the calamity she had brought upon him got the upper hand, and he said impatiently :

‘Tsh ! What’s the good of talking in that way ? The thing is done, and it’s a bad business—for me, at any rate. And I think the less said about it the better.’

‘I cannot agree with you there,’ she said, putting strong control upon herself, in order to be able to speak calmly. ‘If I had sent for you, just to tell you what I have done, and leave things as they are, that would be insolence, and nothing else. I had something quite different in my mind, but I was forced to explain myself first. If we talk it over, and agree about it, I think we can do a great deal to make it better. We are living—he is dead ; and the living have more power than the dead, in spite of their wickedness and of the vile wills they make.’

‘Oh, that’s quite a riddle to me. I don’t understand what you mean.’

‘I mean this. He has left his money to me, and it is quite clear he meant you not to have it. But it seems to me that he made one great mistake. He did not say out and out that you were never to have it; I suppose he was afraid of giving me too much power in that way. He wanted to control all circumstances; and he tried to do too much. He cannot make me take his money, or spend it. He cannot prevent me from giving it away when I have got it, nor you from taking it. We can baffle him yet, and laugh at him, if you will consent to overlook my wrong for the present, and act with me.’

‘And what do you propose to do yourself?’

‘I can keep that fortune—that fifty thousand pounds that he speaks of. What can I possibly want with more? What can I do with more?’

‘You forget a few things,’ said Hugh drily.

‘Why, what?’

‘In the first place, you don’t come of age for two years. Everything is in the hands of your guardians and solicitors in the meantime, and you could not touch a penny.’

‘But till then, if I understand rightly, I have eight hundred a year to live upon.’

‘Your guardian has eight hundred a year with which to defray maintenance and other expenses.’

‘I can easily live on one hundred. I want nothing, except to make things right. You could take the rest, you know. Two years—it is a long time to look forward to, but it would pass very quickly if we felt that everything was going to be made right at the end of it.’

‘Even then,’ pursued Hugh, ‘I don’t feel certain that the property would be yours to dispose of. In fact, I’m almost certain it

would not. I'm no lawyer, and I can only speak by guess, but I have a sort of idea that it will only be fairly yours when you are five-and-twenty, and still unmarried—that is, six years from now, if you are still a single woman, you will be your own mistress, and the mistress of his property. I don't believe that before that you will be able to alienate a penny of the estate.'

'But, Hugh, that is absurd. I might not be able, for instance, to give it to you by a deed, or whatever the thing may be; I might not be able to transfer it absolutely from my hands into yours, but the income of it would all be paid to me. When I am twenty-one, I shall have the money to spend as I like; and what is to hinder me from——'

'Spending it on me—thank you,' said Hugh, with a sneer, and a disagreeable smile, and a profound, mocking bow. 'No; you may imagine it to be a trifle, but I could not

possibly submit to that—to come and take as alms from your hand what ought to have been mine by right, for I'm not going to pretend that I think you have as much right to it as I have.' With which he flicked the tablecloth with his fingers.

Even as a timid creature, when brought to bay, becomes fierce and dangerous, so Peril, the embodiment of impatience and impulsiveness, who had been wont to throw over every undertaking in disgust if she did not succeed in instantly getting it settled to her mind, did now get patience out of her very impatience—the crushing calamity and shame which had fallen upon her must be removed at any price—Hugh's good opinion restored, at whatever cost to herself—even at the cost of having at present meekly to submit to be thwarted and taunted by him, which was the hardest thing she had yet been called upon to bear.

'That is just it,' she interrupted him breath-

lessly. ‘That is just what I mean ; you have been like his child to him all these years ; you have been obedient, and you have worked hard, and done everything you ought to have done all that time, and then he behaves like this, and——’

‘He would not have behaved like this, if you——’

‘No, I know, I know ; and that is what makes me so miserable. But since that is the case, it could not be alms, as you call it, Hugh ; there could be no question of such a thing ; it would be simply justice. You must see this,’ she pursued more and more vehemently. ‘Unless I am out of my senses, there cannot be two opinions about it.’

‘Oh, you are not out of your senses, by any means—now. And there is no question about the justice of it, only unfortunately justice can’t always be administered. It can’t in this case, for nothing will make me believe

that it is not better to do without my just due, rather than meekly sit down and receive it at the hands of a capricious girl. Peril! He raised his eyes, and she saw with agony that they were hard and cold, devoid of sympathy or any expression of relenting, and he repeated her name while she stood there, literally in torment, listening to his words. 'Peril, Peril! Those who gave you that name must have had the gift of prophecy, for it fits you like a glove; and I must have been a fool not to understand it before. But I trusted you. A few days ago, I would have taken my oath that whatever you might have been towards those whom you hated, or who had wronged you, you would not have lifted a finger against me; not that I pretend ever to have done anything wonderful for you. I've just acted by you as a brother would act by his sister; and I just took it for granted, too, that you would act in the same way by

me. It seems I was wrong, and that the person for whom one has tried to do the best one could at every opportunity, is the last person one ought to trust to. You have given me such a lesson as to my own folly and simplicity that you must excuse my remarking, I should be an idiot ever again to place any reliance on your word. A perilous friend you have been to me, and no mistake. I don't mean to reproach you—I don't mean to complain or lament—you need fear nothing of that sort. Nay, I'll even go further,' said Hugh, with a touch of boyish magniloquence, as he threw his head back, and seemed to make a supreme concession ; 'I'll even go further, and say, I am sure you did not mean it—at least, you would not have meant it if you had not been perfectly blind with passion ; but you see, the person who can get into such a passion once may do it again ; and you will own that after ex-

periencing one caress of this kind from you, I should be simply an imbecile to lay myself open to another of the same sort.'

'Do you mean that you do not believe me?'

'I might ask if you have given me much encouragement just lately to believe you. But I am sure you believe every word you say now, and mean every promise you make; and so far, I believe you too—yes. But, if I must tell the naked truth, I don't trust you, and I really don't think you can be surprised at it.'

'And how am I to make you trust me? If I walked up to you and said, "See, Hugh, here is the first instalment of what I owe you. Take it, and do what you like with it"—would you believe me then, or not?'

He only raised his eyebrows, without making any reply. Peril waited a little while watching him anxiously, and then said mournfully:

‘ I see—you mean you would believe in me just so far, but that you have no security that I should continue true to my promises. It sounds very dreadful to me. I wish I could make you see the steadfast purpose I have in my own mind. But I can understand it—I can see from your point of view too. Well, will you let it stand like this—that when I begin to fulfil my part of the bargain, you will begin to believe in my good intentions ; and that when I have fulfilled it all, to the end of these six years that you speak of, and have made it all right at last, then I may ask you if you will forgive me—some-time ? Will you let it be like that ? I cannot ask less, if I am to ask anything at all.’

‘ I see what you mean, Peril, and, as I say, I quite believe your intentions. I’m sorry I cannot fall in with them, and relieve you of any little unpleasantness you may feel in the

matter. But you see, during that six years that we speak of, I should have to be loafing round, waiting for my instalments, as you call them, and liable to be thrown adrift at any moment, when some other fancy took possession of your mind. It is not a position in which I have any ambition to see myself figuring, and you must forgive me if I decline your proposal. It will be better in every way that I should try to make the best of the little I have got. I would advise you to do the same with yours, and I am sure you have every qualification for making a brilliant success.'

Peril's only answer, at first, was a look. Hugh could not help seeing this look, nor could he help the sight of it making him feel uncomfortable, and giving him a sensation that he was, perhaps, not acting generously, though of course very finely and with great spirit. But, after all, he had stated the facts

of the case pretty much as they really were, and it was simply a question whether he should continue to wait upon Peril's uncertain will for six years, with the chance that, at the end, she would still be in the same mind as now (one chance in a million, he argued), and would do him justice ; or, promptly pick up his shrunken wallet of worldly goods and future prospects, and fare forth into the world with what cheer he might. The latter course recommended itself to him in every way. His pride preferred it, and his independence, and his resentment desired that she should be punished for her treachery. Poverty appeared a small thing in comparison to submitting to the humiliation of waiting upon her will.

She said at last, appealingly :

‘ You don't really mean that, Hugh ? You don't mean that you will leave me in this way, without further scruple ? ’

‘ I really don’t see how it can be said to be my doing, Peril, that you are left. But for you, there would have been no question of such a thing. I should have been your natural protector, and——’

‘ I know, I know ! And now I have to depend upon your generosity to get me out of this mess that I have got us both into. Won’t you help me out of it ?’

Here was an explicit question, requiring an explicit answer. Hugh gave it after a momentary hesitation.

‘ Under the circumstances, no, Peril. You must excuse me.’

‘ Do you mean that you absolutely refuse my petition ?’ she asked, growing very pale, but speaking more quietly and steadily than she had hitherto done.

‘ Proffer it again, six years hence, with mind unchanged, and then I’ll listen to it ; or, when you fall desperately in love with some one, and

throw your fortune overboard for his sake, why, then——’

‘Very well. Since you choose to take this line towards me, I must take my own course in the matter.’

Her face had grown hard ; it looked like the face of a woman many years older than she was, who had seen sorrow. She sat down upon the couch again, and perhaps it would have been hard to say which of the two felt the more desolate and bitter, with that sordid, thankless, tearless bitterness peculiar to quarrels and misunderstandings about money : disputes which contain no one spark of anything to ennoble, no consolation to sweeten or mitigate the anguish ; nothing but the miserable, barren bone of contention itself. Hugh rose instantly on her last words. He seemed anxious to be gone.

‘Listen, Hugh,’ she observed, as he went towards the door. ‘I am going to sit in this

room. You are welcome in it whenever you choose. I suppose you know that ? I want you to understand it, because I am going to bid them tell that woman that she will not be admitted to it under any pretext. I shall not inflict my presence upon any of you much longer. I did not want you to think I included you with her—that's all.'

Hugh looked at her, almost tempted to make some inquiry, and then bowed to her, wished her good-evening, and went away. Peril was left alone ; the room seemed empty and blank, and the silence pitiless. She had a keen and vivid consciousness that the first of her efforts to put things right had failed ignominiously and completely. While she sat pondering over it, and trying to get her whirling thoughts into some kind of order, Mr. Hankinson was announced.

Bracing herself up as well as she could, she had a long interview with him ; after which

the manager went away, whistling softly to himself, and thinking what a mercy it was that Margaret had refused Hugh Nowell when she did ; wishing, also, that he could only have had a forewarning of all this, and then he need not have committed himself, even so far as he had done, to Margaret. If there were any truth, reflected Mr. Hankinson, in your spirit-rappings and your table-turnings, they ought to be able to assist a man at some such crisis of his fate as this, or what were they good for ? Perhaps, however, so astute a person as he, with such very good cards—all the honours, one might say—and one or two other good trumps behind them : with these advantages, he might be able to command the game, even without spiritual assistance.



CHAPTER XV.

FAREWELL TO GREAT NORTH STREET.

WHEN Mr. Hankinson had gone, Peril sat down and wrote a letter. She was surprised to find sobs shaking her, and tears streaming down her face as her pen travelled over the paper. The feeling with which she had sat down had certainly not been one of tenderness, but the tears and the sobs were uncontrollable. Perhaps her better soul wept in that it had been baulked in its desire to expand into action.

‘MY DEAR UNCLE WISTAR,

‘I received your letter yesterday morning, and I thank you for it.

‘Mr. Nowell was buried to-day, and since the funeral we have heard how he has left his property. He has made a very unjust will, leaving almost everything to me, and only a hundred a year to my cousin Hugh, who has always been looked upon, and, indeed, actually was his heir until about a fortnight ago. There are certain conditions to be observed before the property really becomes mine, but they are not of much importance. Hugh Nowell, I must tell you, is the only person who ever displayed one spark of kindness or fellow-feeling for me, since I came to live in this accursed house. I wish to make some arrangement by which, when I come of age, he may receive some share of what is justly his; but he will not consent to my proposal. I am telling you this now because the subject is so abhorrent to me that I wish never to name it again, unless I am absolutely obliged to do so. You say in your letter that I may

come to you if I want a home. Though I am to be so very rich, it seems, there never was a greater outcast, or a person who stood more in need of a home than I do. I will take shelter with you, if I may. May I come at once?—at least, as soon as I can leave this place? All business arrangements we could make when I arrive. You will name your own conditions for receiving me into your house. I am glad you will not alter any of your arrangements. It is what I should wish. The farther I can get away from here, the more different the place I get to, the better pleased I shall be. I used to look forward to happier days, when I should learn to know you, and my mother's home; it was always with pleasure that I thought of this, and it is not my fault if I now look to it as my refuge from trouble, rather than a place where I expect to be happy. Send me a line to tell me how soon I may come, and

believe me when I say that no one can more loathe the name of Nowell than does your niece,

‘PERIL.’

It was too late for that night’s post, therefore this letter must wait till the morrow to be despatched. When she had written it, Peril leaned back in her chair, feeling exceedingly weary, and realizing that there was now nothing for her to do but wait—to sit still if she could, and either ponder upon the calamity that had befallen her, or try to put it out of her mind altogether. That was, of course, out of the question; her thoughts stretched out into the dim future, with vague, wondering uncertainty. Hugh would not help her; she was cast upon her own resources, with a long fight before her, and no one on her side except herself.

On the following day she got her letter to

Mr. Wistar posted, and had another interview with Mr. Hankinson ; not so long this time. He told her it was quite easy for her to go away ; he authorized her to stay with Mr. Wistar as long as she liked. As she was not of age she could have no direct business to transact. It would all be done for her, and he would see that all necessary information was forwarded to her.

‘Spare me all *but* necessary information, Mr. Hankinson,’ she said drily. ‘If I could wipe away all recollection of this place, and of everyone in it, and begin all over again—that is what I would like to do.’

Mr. Hankinson looked becomingly grave and doleful. In his own mind he was thinking that her most convenient behest should certainly be complied with, and that from him she should learn nothing of her affairs save what it was, indeed, absolutely necessary for her to know. She said she should only wait

until she heard from Mr. Wistar, and she would take care to inform Mr. Hankinson of her address, and the date of her departure. If he had occasion to see her again before that took place, she was at his service at any time. Much gratified in his secret soul, Mr. Hankinson went away, and Peril smiled to herself.

‘I don’t feel very clever, and I don’t know anything,’ she said mentally, ‘but I have an instinct which tells me not to trust *you* with any scheme.’

Mr. Wistar’s answer to her letter came as soon as it reasonably could.

‘MY DEAR NIECE,

‘I am sorry to hear you are so dissatisfied with your large fortune. It isn’t a complaint one often hears of—but the reverse. It certainly seems a pity that the youngster should be cut so very short, especially as you

don't mention any prospect of him and you making it square in another way. I think he'll come round when the shoe begins to pinch. There's nothing like that for bringing unreasonable people to see common-sense. But of this, more when we meet. Come when you like ; only let me have a word on the morning of the day you will be here ; also whether you will have many traps, for I must drive down to Foulhaven to meet you. There's only one train in the day ; it comes from all parts of the world, and gets in at six in the evening. Looking forward to making your acquaintance, I am,

‘Your uncle,

‘GEORGE WISTAR.’

This abrupt and candid effusion pleased Peril, she hardly knew why. She caught herself smiling over it, and hastened with some eagerness to answer it, telling him to expect

her on the following evening, by that train which came from all parts of the world ; and then she set herself to find out, with the help of a railway guide, at what hour she had to leave Darkingford. Early—it was evidently a long and tedious journey, consuming seven hours of time. She would have to leave Great North Street by half-past ten on the following morning. She was very glad of that.

Peril passed the day quite alone. She had sent one of the maids out to make a few necessary purchases of things she would want before going for so long a time into the country. But there was nothing to look forward to—no hope, no pleasure, no sunshine. The day seemed very wearisome and long, and she was haunted by a nervous dread lest anything should occur at the last to prevent her departure, which, to her morbid imagination, had grown to seem more like an escape

than a simple setting off from one place to go to another.

In the evening, Nowell knocked at her door and came in. She had not seen him since she had made her overtures to him, and had them rejected by him. He said he had heard she was going away the next day, and wished to say good-bye to her.

‘You are very polite,’ she said ironically, reflecting that her departure might have been less disagreeable, had he so willed it.

‘I can’t stay more than two minutes,’ he added ; ‘I’ve got Lawford in the dining-room. We have an engagement. Would you care to say good-bye to him before you go?’

‘Yes, I should like to do so.’

‘I have taken a room at his lodgings, *pro tem.*,’ continued Hugh. ‘We are going to camp together for a little while ; our boats are now much of a muchness with regard to size and purse.’

With which he went to fetch Lawford, and before Peril had had time to recover from the surprise occasioned by his announcement about the lodgings, Hugh and his friend were with her.

There was a little desultory conversation ; no allusion being made by anybody to past events. At last, saying again that they had an engagement, Hugh rose to go. Lawford, with some interest, watched the parting.

‘Probably I shall not see you again,’ she said, in a dry, composed voice.

‘Are you leaving early to-morrow morning?’

‘The train goes at eleven ; I shall have to leave here by half-past ten, of course,’ she answered, in the same dry, indifferent tones.

‘I wish I could have come to see you off, but I am engaged just at that time,’ said Hugh, rather awkwardly.

‘I would not have you trouble yourself on

any account,' she answered, coldly. 'I shall take Smith to the station to see after my luggage. Then, good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Peril. I hope——'

She lifted her hand, and though she spoke as quietly as ever, Lawford noticed that her face had blanched, even to the lips.

'Stop, Hugh! let us be honest,' she said. 'Wish nothing for me, and hope nothing for me. It is a farce to wish happiness and good things to one who is forced into a position which she hates and loathes, and never forgets for a moment. For you, you have chosen your path freely, and though I do not know what it is or what it will be, yet I wish you joy in it, and success in all your undertakings; better than any that has attended mine, so far—and a prosperous and happy life.'

Nowell made no reply. There was that in her manner and tone which did not en-

courage him to speak. She turned away from him, and held out her hand to Lawford, saying simply enough :

‘ Good-bye, Mr. Lawford. Ours has been a short acquaintance, and not a very bright one, has it? You once told me you had a little estate at Wiswell, so it is just possible that we may meet again, if ever you go there I fancy it will be my home now, for an indefinite time.’

‘ We may meet, then,’ said Paul gravely. ‘ I can only say that it will be for my happiness if we do.’

And he took her hand with a sort of chivalrous respect, and bowed low over it. He understood. Peril had always had an idea that he understood. She glanced from one to the other of them, but made no sign.

* * * * *

The utter dreariness of a raw morning of the later February, in the arena of a great

city railway station. The huge vaulted building was half-filled with fog. The air was dank, and the smoke hung in the heavy atmosphere. Gas flared in every direction, wherever it could flare, and only served to make the greyness greyer, the fog and the smoke more palpable and more hideous.

The train which was to carry Peril north-eastwards stood waiting. The doors of the carriages were open. She had just arrived, and Smith, Mr. Nowell's old servant, had put her rugs and bag into an empty compartment. He left her standing by the door of it while he went to take her ticket and see to the disposal of her luggage. Peril stood tall, pale, and sad, looking rather blankly at the crowds who thronged and pushed about the station. She felt herself very lonely and friendless amidst them all. Probably most of them had, at any rate, a friend or a relative to see them off ; the very poorest, travelling third class, with bags

and bundles by way of luggage. She, with all her possessions, all her youth and beauty, depended upon a servant-man like Smith, who did his duty because he was paid to do it, and who, in seeking for another situation, had not come to her for a character, but to Hugh. This was all she had by way of farewell company, now that she was leaving the place where she had lived for four years. It looked well for her, she thought bitterly, and for those who had been her companions. It had to be borne, somehow—lived through, got over : so had life itself, and she wondered vaguely how long one could go on in that dull, wretched way, neither acutely miserable nor in any way happy ; but monotonously indifferent, dead, uninterested. For weeks ? months ? years ? There seemed every prospect of her finding it out by experience.

She drew a long sigh as she came to this conclusion, and raised her eyes from the dingy

pavement on which they had been resting. They suddenly fixed and filled with interest, at any rate, if not with brightness. That was not a gleam of sunshine ; no, though the effect upon her mind was much the same. It was a man ; someone whom she knew, surely, who came forward rather hesitatingly, with a slightly heightened colour, and a look as nearly approaching awkwardness as it was possible for him to wear. He came up to her, his look of hesitation disappearing when he saw that Peril began to smile, and raised his hat.

‘ Mr. Lawford ! ’

‘ Good-morning, Miss Nowell. I hope you don’t think me very officious. I heard Hugh say that he couldn’t see you off, and I was quite sure you would not require the services of a certain lady for that purpose, and so I thought—it is so dreary, you know, on a day like this—I thought you might forget to get some newspapers, or they might not see that

you had a foot-warmer. At any rate,' he concluded, 'I came to see if I could do anything for you.'

'It is very kind of you,' said Peril, her voice almost dying away, and her eyes filling with tears. 'You are quite right about the dreariness of it. I was just thinking I had never met with anything more so.'

'Then I am glad I came,' said Lawford, smiling. 'Don't stand outside here. Let me put you into the carriage, and I will keep a look-out for your servant.'

He handed her in, and Peril, unconsciously soothed and pleased, put her arm through the strap by the window, and looked down at him with a softened expression.

'I am glad you are going to a place that I know,' he said; 'though I don't know it much. I had only a short time at Wiswell after my return from India, but it attracted me wonderfully; it felt so cool and damp, and

so homely and rugged, I liked it. If I had only a little more money, and if it would not be so unjust to my little lad to shut him up in a place like that, there is nothing I should like better than to go and settle down there, and be as poor and as contented as anyone in the world.'

'Ah! you have no ambition—you said so,' said Peril, with a rather melancholy smile; 'and I don't wonder much. I am very glad you came here, Mr. Lawford, for it gives me an opportunity of saying something to you which I should have said last night; only Hugh was there, so it was impossible. He says he has taken rooms in the house where you are.'

'Yes, he has. We are going to rough it together.'

'Did he tell you how he comes to have to rough it? Did he tell you what I wanted him to do?'

‘Yes. He did not enter into many particulars ; but he told me about it.’

‘And gave no hope, I suppose, that he would ever comply with my wish ?’

‘Well—no ; but I don’t think I would trouble myself too much about that. Believe me, he would not be Hugh Nowell—he would not be the person you know and like, if he had complied with your wish. I think he may come round in time. You must have patience.’

‘I suppose it is good discipline to have to learn the lesson that is more difficult for one to learn than anything else in the world. I must, as you say, have patience. If Hugh imagines for one moment that I shall ever be turned aside from my purpose, he is mistaken. But what I wanted to say to you is this : as he is going to live with you, you will have ample opportunity of studying his circumstances, and he will doubtless tell you all his

affairs. Will you do something for me? Would it be a great trouble to you?

‘I feel pretty sure it would be a pleasure, whatever it is.’

‘It is just this—to keep a watch over him and his affairs; and if ever you see an opening, any way in which I could be of service to him, or could steal a march upon him, and get him to do what I want, without hurting his pride, you will let me know, will you? I explain myself vaguely. I hardly know what I mean, but I think it possible that such an opportunity might occur. I should be so grateful to you if you would do this for me.’

‘You may trust to me,’ said Paul, battling with a feeling of mortification and disappointment, which, he quite understood, was a very foolish feeling for him to cherish.

Her thoughts, he perceived, were all steadfastly fixed upon Nowell and his concerns. ‘I certainly need never have troubled myself,’

reflected Paul, 'to wonder if she would think it odd of me to come. She does not think of me at all except as a kind of vehicle by which to get at Hugh, perhaps. It was so when she took me for a walk, and talked to me; it has been so all along. I suppose she would be amazed if I were suddenly to show fight, as it were, and raise objections to being treated in that way; she doesn't mean any wrong to me.'

'Oh, thank you! I shall never be able to thank you properly if you will do this,' she answered him very earnestly. 'How very glad I am that I got this opportunity of speaking to you!'

While Paul was smiling a little to himself about this, Smith came up to bring Peril her ticket, and tell her where she would find her luggage when she had to change carriages. She dismissed the man, and was again alone with Paul.

‘Do you know, Mr. Lawford, if you had not come I was going to give my address to Smith, who I know is very fond of Hugh, and ask him to do this for me ; but it just makes all the difference in the world to have been able to ask you instead.’

She smiled, and the smile was so sweet, and withal so sad, that it deprived Paul of the power to do anything but murmur some commonplace in answer to her words.

‘It was kindness she wanted,’ he said to himself ; ‘I had an inkling of it from the very first. She had that look on her face that people have who are always doing battle and warding off blows instead of receiving caresses. I’m more than ever convinced of it now. I hope she will find a little of the milk of human kindness where she is going.’

It was a conviction to which Lawford adhered loyally, on the whole, and to the end, and through everything that befell both him

and her. To avoid giving a direct answer to her last words he stopped a boy, bought a little bundle of newspapers, and put them on the opposite seat. And then the inevitable shrill whistle sounded, the train began to move. Their eyes met as Peril clasped his offered hand, with no uncertain grasp, and said frankly, heartily, and openly :

‘ Good-bye. I shall often think of you, for you have been very kind to me, and I hope we shall meet again.’

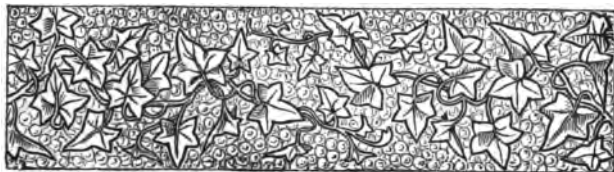
The last thing she saw, as the train glided out of the station, was the figure of Paul Lawford gazing after her, as he lifted his hat from his head, with a certain expression, half-gravity, half-wistfulness, in his blue eyes.

He, as he walked down the slope from the station into the street, shook his head, saying to himself :

‘ If only she had not got everything and I nothing, I would see if I couldn’t make her

forget Hugh Nowell. But it would be too unequal ; it would look scandalous, so I had better let it alone—and save my soul alive.’





PART II.
STANESACRE.





CHAPTER I.

BEGINNING AGAIN.

‘**I**S Miss Nowell in?’

‘No, sir; but Mr. Wistar is:
he’s just come in from the farm.’

‘Oh! then I will go in and see him, if he
isn’t otherwise engaged.’

The voice was a commanding one, but sweet and genial withal. When the door was set open the owner of the voice stooped his head a little, for the roof-tree looked low, and his stature was high, and his shoulders were broad. He followed the maid into the dining-parlour of the farm, at the left hand of the passage, and found Mr. Wistar bending,

apparently absorbed in interest, over his book of flies. He turned the leaves over, and compared their contents every now and then with another fly which he held in his hand. But at the entrance of the visitor he glanced up: a good-natured look dawned over his grim elderly face, like sunshine on the wrinkles of a piece of rock; he left his flies, and greeted his guest:

‘Good-morrow, Mr. Trelawney; I’m fain to see you. How are you to-day?’

‘Hearty, thank you. I need hardly put the question to you, I think,’ said Mr. Trelawney, shaking hands with the farmer.

By Mr. Trelawney’s dress he was a clergyman of the Church of England. By his look, manner, voice, air, and everything about him, a man of the world, and a gentleman of breeding. He was, in fact, Rector of Wiswell; had held that post now for many years, and rough old farmer Wistar was

one of his greatest friends and staunchest allies.

‘What have you got there—a new fly?’ asked Mr. Trelawney, with interest, for he too was a brother of the miscalled gentle craft.

‘It reckons to be,’ was the disparaging reply. ‘Mike Nesbit gave it me—a harum-scarum chap—knows little enough about it, I fancy. A new salmon fly, that was never known to fail so long as there was a fish to be killed. I’ve just been counting over all I have had given to me that were never known to fail. There’s some half-dozen of them, and they’re much of a muchness, sir; very much of a muchness, and I reckon this chap is no better than all the others.’

‘Likely enough. Some people do seem to think that it is the fly that does it all, and that relations between the fish at one end and the fool at the other depend entirely upon the bait.’

He smiled a fine and gracious smile, and took a seat near the table. He was even yet a very handsome man, though now almost past middle age, verging on the confines of 'old.' He had grizzled abundant dark hair, and brilliant eyes, also very dark, and full of fire, though a fire that was tempered and softened. He had a noble and a handsome face, adorned now with many wrinkles—a face which was capable of expressing many emotions; and he, if anyone ever did, aroused hate or love in the hearts of others, very much according to the nature of those other hearts, whether they were good or bad. His was a character thoroughly appreciated by the rugged one of old Wistar, who, on his part, was not devoid of a certain massive, solid comeliness—not an aristocratic, or refined, or highly-polished aspect, but a homely, northern, flinty independence and dignity combined, which could

be urbane, and was very often almost imposing.

‘I came to call upon your niece, Miss Nowell, both on my own account and on my wife’s behalf. She is very sorry she can’t come herself, but she’s a prisoner yet, as you know.’

‘Ay, I know. How is she?’

‘Pretty well, thank you. She never feels equal to much, till after February Fill-dyke is out: he is keeping up his reputation this year. I told her I saw Miss Nowell with you at church on Sunday, and she said I was to call, because she wishes to make your niece’s acquaintance.’

‘I’m very sorry she’s out just now. With Mistress Trelawney’s leave, I’ll fetch her up to the Rectory some afternoon, very soon.’

‘I hope you will. I suppose her advent has made a change in your life?’

‘Ay,’ said the farmer; ‘in a way, it has.

I'd like to tell you all about it, Mr. Trelawney. And first, read you this letter; the first one I ever had from her, written just after her grandfather's funeral.'

He handed to Mr. Trelawney the letter which Peril had written after her interview with Hugh about the will.

'What do you think o' that?' asked Mr. Wistar. 'I can tell you, it frightened me. I began to wish I hadn't been so free with my invitations. When it came to harbouring a young woman with, I suppose, some twenty thousand a year, when she comes into it all, who called her home an accursed house, and said she loathed her father's name—it took my breath away, and I began to remember odds and ends that I'd heard long ago, about her temper and her character.'

'It is a very remarkable letter,' said Mr. Trelawney reflectively, 'to come from 'so young a person—a very strange letter. There

is a hardness and a hopelessness in its very tone, which strike one instantly.'

'Ay, there is so! Well, I thought I'd better make the best of it, and let her come and try, as I'd promised she should, and she seemed disposed that way. So I wrote and told her to. I said as much as that I thought it was a pity she and this lad that's been left so badly didn't make it up, and join at the property by marrying each other. I see you are laughing. I expect it was a very improper sort of thing to say, but I said it. Well, she came. Last Friday it was, she got here, and I never was more surprised in my life.'

'In what way?'

'Well, for one thing, she's the very handsomest young woman I ever set eyes on. "Pretty" doesn't describe her. She's grand and beautiful, like something you read of; and has eyes that look upon you in a manner

to make you creep, if you let them fascinate you. You must have seen that she was uncommon-looking, if you'd time to notice her at all, o' Sunday. She reminds me a bit of her poor mother, but finer and grander and stiller than she was. Eh, I thought, when I saw her and heard her voice, so soft and low—one of those deep, mournful voices, you know—we shall never hit it off, my dear. You are town-bred, and half foreign in your ways, and I'm a rough Yorkshire farmer. It'll never do. But as I thought she looked very low and miserable, I did what I could to cheer her up and make her comfortable, and blast my eyes!—no, that's not what I mean: it sticks to me like a burr, does that expression—but I'll be hanged if she is one bit like her looks, or her letter either.'

'Gentler, I suppose, and milder than you thought?'

'She *may* have a temper. I've heard of

it more than once ; she's been as mild as milk since she came here. I can hardly believe it was her that wrote that letter. I showed it to her, and asked her, and she said it was ; but it doesn't fit in at all to my satisfaction. Why, nothing could be sweeter, or softer, or gentler than she is. Nothing comes wrong to her. I made an apology for our homely ways, but said I really could not alter them without great inconvenience. She said she hoped I never would ; it was more fit that she should alter her ways for me than t'other way about. And that's right and fair enough,' said Mr. Wistar, with an impartial air. 'She's taken to wandering about by herself, and "exploring the neighbourhood," as she calls it. I tell her to wait till the spring o' the year gets more advanced—it's winter yet in Wiswell ; but she says she thinks it must be very nice here always. For all that, she doesn't look happy, and I

do think sometimes I'd rather see a person cross than unhappy. There's a far-away look in her eyes, and a brooding sort of expression coming constantly over her face. She's thinking of something that I know nothing about, I expect. But for all that, I'm disappointed in her—very pleasantly disappointed, I am.'

'I am glad to hear it. You make me feel much interested in her.'

'She won't mention anything about her grandfather's illness, or her life in his house. She says it was like a bad dream, and she hopes she's awakening from it now, but she'll forget it if she can.'

'You don't think she was actually ill-treated?'

'Eh, nay, except by caring nought about her, and that's ill-treatment to a young creature that's in want of friends. And this cousin—Hugh, or whatever he was—seems

to have shown her rather more kindness than the rest of them—behaved like a human being, in fact. She's got an idea that she's robbed him of his property, and she keeps giving mysterious hints of having done him a wrong. I don't know the ins and outs of it, and I don't want to trouble her about it, but let her grow happy and comfortable first, at any rate—if she can, that is.'

'And it seems, from her letter, that this young man will not let her share with him in this money?'

'It seems like as if he wouldn't.'

'Very silly and priggish of him—and very like a young man who imagines himself to be the centre of the universe—which they mostly do,' said Mr. Trelawney, with an ambiguous smile. 'I hope she will presently get over that.'

'Old Nowell was an old Tartar, if ever there was one. He gave himself over, body

and soul, to money-making ; and folks thought that because he went to chapel, and gave to charities, and believed in the Bible and all that, that he was all right, and a very good, pious man. I've observed how easy it is to deceive a mass o' folk in that way. The great sillies stand there with their eyes shut and their mouths open, and someone goes by, with a bundle of crimes and swindlings and oppressions in one hand, and a text in the other. " Here, my friend," says he, and sticks the text down their throats. Then they murmur, " How delicious that tastes !" and ruminate upon it for a bit, till he's had time to get past. It's the way all over the world. There's a sop that'll shut everybody's mouth, if you only can get hold of the right one. All his texts did not prevent him from murdering his sons—for I call it murder, the way he treated them ; and now, he's managed to leave things in the very best way for

making everyone uncomfortable and dissatisfied. He was what I call a right bad man—and that's shutting my mouth about the way that he treated my poor sister. The world's well rid of him, and I can't help hoping that these youngsters will make it up somehow, and cheat him in the end.'

'Perhaps they will,' said Mr. Trelawney, rising, with a smile. 'Good-morning. I am glad I have seen you. Mrs. Trelawney will be more wishful than ever to see Miss Nowell, so don't forget to bring her soon.'

'You may be sure I shan't. I know what a good thing Mistress Trelawney's friendship would be for her. Good-day to you.'

* * * * *

Peril had, as her uncle said, taken to wandering about by herself. At the time of her arrival at Wiswell it was dark. She had seen nothing of the seaport of Foulhaven—nothing of the road over which they drove

from Foulhaven to Wiswell. It was all darkness ; but when she had descended from the hired coach in which they had driven (for it was a showery, gusty night, and they had been obliged to have a covered vehicle), she had been conscious, as she stood waiting on the doorstep, that the air which blew on her face was fresh and pure, at once soft and bracing ; it had soothed her jarred nerves as balm soothes a wound, and had felt like a cordial too. Then had come the evening with her uncle—the bright, and simple, and homely meal, served in the parlour, which had a lingering perfume of lavender and dried rose-leaves ; and the making acquaintance with the old man.

Peril was not so self-absorbed as most people imagined when there was anyone or anything to study in which she felt an interest. She had, from the first moment of seeing it, liked the old farmer's face ; it was a different

type of face from any she had yet encountered, either at home or abroad; and she was touched inexpressibly by its openness, ruggedness, and a sort of shy surprise in its eyes when they encountered hers—a kind of wonder and puzzle. Early hours, she then and there found, were the rule at the farm. At ten o'clock she was in her bedroom, and all was quiet. All quiet indeed—so quiet that she, accustomed to the monotonous, wearying roll and rumble that came up from the city's heart, and rattled also along Great North Street itself until far on into the night, felt a sort of thrill and dread creep over her as she stood still in the midst of the spacious, but homely and low-roofed room which had been assigned to her, and literally listened to the hush and silence which pervaded the whole atmosphere. Was there really that silence, or was it only that walls were thick, and windows solidly set, and so shut out the

sounds? It oppressed her, and at the same time it pleased her; and she pulled up the blind, and after some fumbling, succeeded in unhasping the casement and pushing open the window. She thrust her head out—again that delicious, soft, fresh air, playing upon her temples, and breathing peace into her mind; and, hark! what was that long, monotonous and resonant thunder? Bending her ear intently to it she listened, puzzled at first, and then, with a smile, remembered. It was the boom of the waves, breaking upon that iron-bound coast; and from the way in which the sound was borne to her ear, this room must face east.

The window-sill was low, and Peril, kneeling, rested her elbows on it, propped the casement open with a hook which seemed intended for the purpose, and long she listened to that distant, reverberating boom of the surf upon the shore—listened till it

grew perceptibly louder, so that she knew the tide must be rising higher and coming nearer. Presently she had the sense that most likely she was the only person waking beneath that roof—her brain was too active, her thoughts too excited, just then, to let her think of sleeping; but she did not feel hot and restless, and afraid, as she was wont to do when thus wakeful. There was something in the peace, and the stillness, and solemnity of it all, which got gently but irresistibly conveyed into her own heart: she did not feel happy—she felt very sad, low, and grieved and humbled in her mind and her heart, as she knelt there, and the distant, rolling waves, which she could not see, seemed to tell her that she had made a sad mess of her own life, and had not conduced much to the happiness of that of anyone else. But, if she had never had that mortifying conviction more strongly before, so also she

had never experienced before the same sense of inward fulness, or seen the same blessed glint of light over the darkness which seemed to shine for her now, in this night. Perhaps, after all, there was peace for her also; perhaps she was destined to find it here. When at last she closed the window and went to bed, she slept, deeply, dreamlessly, for the first time for many nights.

Though this feeling of rest and healing did not remain with her in all its pristine strength, yet neither did it vanish altogether. By the close of the following day, she had wandered about for many hours in the open air; had looked for herself upon the cold, chill grey of the winter sea; had walked down the almost perpendicular hill from her uncle's house, through the extraordinary little village of Wiswell, which was literally hung upon the sides of a gorge, down to the water-side, and thence on to the shore, and round

one of the mighty cliffs, to the north. This was a wild and terrific coast; the cliffs were high, dark and precipitous; at their feet, horrent black rocks, like sharp teeth of gigantic size, strewed the shore, and showed their jagged points at some distance away from land. Four miles to the north was the fishing and seaport town and ship-building centre of Foulhaven; but it was not visible from Wiswell. A great mass of ragged black rocks, called Black Nab, projected far into the sea; round their base the white surges crawled and hissed and curled, and this barrier effectually prevented any view of aught beyond. Peril felt that it must at all times be a wild, stern, and bleak shore; and that she saw it now in perhaps its saddest, if not at its sternest aspect. This last was reserved for the days or nights when some great tempest from the north-east would come sweeping down upon the land, shriek-

ing in horrid triumph, and driving great ships, like cardboard toys, upon those pitiless outworks of sharply-pointed black rock. Then, indeed, there were sights and sounds never to be forgotten by those who chanced to encounter them.

Peril's own stormy soul rejoiced in the stormy scene. It might be lonely, desolate, dreary; but it was fine and impressive; it might breed a spirit of Spartan sternness in its children, but never anything small or mean. The very stature of the people formed a contrast, and a glorious one, in Peril's eyes, to that of the sons of manufacturing industry, and the daughters of the same, whom she had left behind her in Darkingford. Here she met gigantic fisherfolk—men and lads, brawny of chest, huge of limb and shoulder, and muscular all over—striding about with their long legs, and surveying her when they met her with that glittering, far-seeing look

peculiar to the children of a sea-faring race. The women matched the men who were their husbands, brothers and sweethearts; they, too, were big and broad, and many of them bonny also. Neither high heels nor abominations of tied-back skirts were known amongst them; they, too, had a frank, free glance, and looked as if, whatever else they knew, they were unacquainted with fear.

Her second day, which was a Saturday, Peril devoted to an inland ramble. Asking no questions, but going whither she chose, she followed the first road she came to, and presently found herself in an elevated position, with a view of wild, sweeping country, with great moors not far away to the west, and with valleys which, she could see even now, must be fruitful and fertile in due season. Afar off, towards Foulhaven, she saw the ruin of an ancient building standing on a cliff, and overlooking the sea—the remains of an abbey

which had once been a proud one, and whose relics, as they stood now, ragged and battered, had the air of stubbornly holding on to the soil, and defying earth, air, and water alike. Long Peril gazed at this object, the silent centre, as it were, of the silent scene. Then she wandered along some fields on the top of the cliff, and then along a high, upland road, with a broad belt of grass, unenclosed by the stone wall which shut in the fields. She leaned her arms on a gate, from which she had a view of the sea, and found that a sort of arch was erected over the said gate, the nature of which arch was a mystery to her. It was composed of two pieces of a white, bleached substance, 'for all the world like bone,' thought Peril, tapping it with her finger-nails. It was thick at the end next the ground, and tapered away towards the top, where it met the corresponding end of the other piece. It afforded no shelter, and

seemed to be just an ornament, of a rather skeletonish, naked appearance. She could not tell what it was, but on her way home observed other similar archways over other gates. She asked her uncle on her return what they were, and was told they were whales' jaw-bones—relics of the time when both Wiswell and Foulhaven had been whaling ports, to and from which whalers went in and out; sailing to the Greenland seas to ply their dangerous trade, and coming back again in triumph, when they had secured their booty. Many a small farmer's younger son joined these expeditions; and the bleached jaw-bones, spanning the gates that opened into the fields, were common in the country for miles around, and might be found even far inland.

Listening to this explanation, and to various legends which her uncle was very willing to tell her over his afternoon pipe and glass,

Peril felt her interest aroused. Her sense of dramatic fitness and her love of adventure were appealed to—this, to her, seemed more like real life than what she had lived ; there was, to her thinking, more substance and more passion in it than in the formal existence of the town. The latter had always been a weariness to her ; this held out some promise of free and untrammelled movement, if of nothing more ; and to Peril's somewhat restless, troubled spirit, it was a boon to have outside space for her body to move about in.

The Sunday came, and she went with her uncle to church in the morning. This also pleased her. After the emotional services and ceremonies to which her convent-life in Rio had accustomed her, it may be imagined that Ebenezer had not appealed very effectually to such religious sentiments as Peril might possess. It had of course revolted and dispelled whatever little

enthusiasm in the matter she might ever have felt. This was quite different. The congregation of Ebenezer were well-to-do ; they had been able to afford the services of a well-known minister. But he had been, all the same, the minister of Ebenezer—the mouthpiece of Ebenezer's religious and social views, seeing with Ebenezer's eyes, and bound down to Ebenezer's spiritual and mental horizon. Peril had hated the sight of the man, and the sound of his voice, and the baldness and dryness and ugliness of the whole service. The one held in this little quiet country church, though simple, was not bald—though plain, had nothing sordid about it. After entering, she sat in some little abstraction, gazing round the church, which she perceived was a new one, bright and gracious to look at ; and she did not notice the entrance of the choir and the clergyman, till suddenly the people rose, and simultaneously with their rising a voice

smote upon her ear, and upon her heart too, with the words, ever old, ever new, always sublime, if we would but know all their meaning, 'I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son.'

Peril gave a little start, an earnest look, and a long sigh. This voice had touched deep and long-untroubled chords, and they vibrated to it strongly, solemnly. As the service proceeded, she became dreamy; she hardly knew what were the spoken words—it was the voice itself for which she listened. After each chant, each response, she hearkened for it, and heard it with joy, even as her eyes rested with a sense of repose and satisfaction which she could in nowise account for upon the noble head and face—full of dignity, full too of humanity, singularly devoid of priestliness—of the man who owned the voice,

She did not feel curious about him or anxious to ask any questions concerning him ; she heard him spoken of as ' Mr. Trelawney,' and held her peace on the subject ; but for all that, the hearing of this voice marked an era in her spiritual experiences.

It was thus, with a heart very sad, but far less bitter than it had been, that Peril began a new week in a new home. It was on this Monday morning that Mr. Trelawney had called to see her, and had found her out.





CHAPTER II.

VOX IN DESERTO.

SHE directed her steps, when she left the house, towards a certain old church which she had noticed in her Saturday's ramble. It stood on high ground, and she fancied that from the graveyard in which it was placed there must be a broad prospect of both sea and land. Nor was she disappointed. It lay about half a mile from her uncle's house, and on higher ground. It did not take her long to walk there ; mounting a little flight of steps in the wall (for the churchyard was raised considerably above the road), she found the wicket

unfastened, and went into the churchyard. The season was a kind one; the weather mild and fine to an exceptional degree. To-day, the sky was blue and the sun shone. On the south side it was deliciously sunny and warm. Peril paused there a moment, and then, interested in the place in which she found herself, she wandered on amongst the tombs for some time before getting any nearer to the church. Far below her she could just catch a glimpse of the village of Wiswell, its red-tiled roofs showing up against the gloom of the brown cliffs in whose shelter the place lay. Beyond there were great headlands to be seen, at whose basis reposed literally a halcyon sea, smooth and glassy as on summer's mildest day. There was almost entire silence—so calm, so pure, so solemn was it all that she felt a momentary chill—a fear lest it should not last.

After gazing for a long time upon the

glistening expanse of sea, she turned, and began to walk round the churchyard, amongst the graves, old and new, green or bare, as the case might be, but all pure and sweet, and unpolluted in that high-standing, wind-swept cemetery. Wild thyme and other sweet moorland plants flourished there, their seeds doubtless carried by winds from the distant hills to the right. And here, on this western slope, rested many a seaman. There was something touching in the records, quaint and simple, of the dead. 'Sacred to the memory,' ran one of them, 'of Thomas Cooper, Master Mariner, lost in the wreck of the *Sea Star* off Wiswell, Jan. 10, 1746. And of Damaris, his wife, who survived him but a Week.'

Of odd, quaint, ridiculous, and pathetic epitaphs, there was goodly store in this strange old churchyard; and ever, in turning from one grave to another, the eyes, wherever they fell, were sure to encounter the record

of some 'Master Mariner' or seaman, very often 'drowned off Wiswell,' or 'Peak' (a great cliff to the south), in some terrible winter storm or equinoctial gale. Where were the storms now, Peril wondered, as she drank in the breath of the spring air, and its exquisite, delicate perfumes, the choicest of both sea and land. After spending an indefinite time in wandering about the little burial-ground, she turned towards the porch, and seeing the door open, she walked into the church.

It was a bare, light, bleak building, white-washed and clean, but entirely destitute of all architectural or æsthetic pretensions. Long windows of clear, greenish-white glass let in every ray of sunshine, or showed, unsoftened, the heavy grey clouds rolling over the stormy sky, just as the case might be. High, square pews, with the names of their proprietors on brass plates, fastened on the

outside of the pew doors—the same old names recurring again and again. Deserted all, now, for this was a disused church, where service was no more held—so Peril had been told by her uncle when she had inquired about it. She had wandered up the aisle, and arrived at the foot of the altar-steps before she found that she was not the only person in the church. It was a little before eleven in the forenoon, and upon the chancel-steps, his back propped against the wall, an old labouring man was reclining and getting his lunch. He had a clasp-knife in his hand; his provisions consisted of a can of cold tea, and a lump of bread and cheese, and he munched and drank lustily, eating out of an impromptu tablecloth consisting of a red and white spotted handkerchief. He continued his meal with much composure, and without noticing Peril by any visible sign, though he must surely have wondered at this apparition of a

stranger, and a lovely one, alone, in the bare old church. He was a hale, apple-cheeked old man, who looked as if he felt that no one could possibly replace him, if by force of circumstances he were removed.

Peril came to the foot of the chancel-steps, and stood before the altar, and presently she raised her eyes towards the roof, attracted by something moving there. Once having looked, her head remained poised backwards, and she gazed in much wonder at what she saw. Truly, it was a strange land this—a land of puzzles and surprises, and of odd, out-of-the-way appearances. Whales' jaw-bones, by way of archways, had appeared sufficiently remarkable to her; but what was this? Hanging from the roof of the chancel were many bunches of strange-looking stuff, strips of a pale drab substance—what, she could not tell, as, with her head tilted backwards till it swam, she speculated on the

mystery. Not sea-weed, surely ; what purpose or meaning could there possibly have been in such a collection ? Not—certainly not strips of dried fish, though the church was disused, and this apple-cheeked old man looked as if he felt that whatever he did would be immediately justified by the fact of his doing it ; yet common-sense seemed to say that such a larder was decidedly inaccessible, not to put the matter on any more moral grounds. She could discern, too, that these colourless strips of—what ? were joined at the end, where they hung to the roof, by a kind of rosette, and they were all slowly gyrating and whirling round and round in the current of air which, it seemed, must be circulating amongst those beams and rafters.

Looking down, at last, because her head began to turn, and her neck ached, her eyes again fell upon the apple-cheeked old man, hewing away at his hunch of bread with his

clasp-knife, and looking at her with his stolid, but good-natured eyes.

‘Can you tell me what those things are?’ she asked, pointing with her long, slim hand to the faded-looking bunches.

There was a pause, while he masticated and swallowed a solid morsel; then drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and replied, slowly, sententiously and pragmatically:

‘Too—kens of affection, for young females.’

‘Tokens of affection for young females!’ Peril repeated after him, with a solemnity caused by extreme surprise. ‘But how—what are they? What are they made of?’

‘Boonches o’ ribbins,’ was the concise reply.

‘Bunches of ribbons! And have they been hung up there in remembrance of people?’

‘Ay, they have. It were like i’ this way,’

he said, becoming more communicative; 'in former times, when there was any young female that died, onmarried, and that was very well-looking, and very much loved and beliked by all her companions, they came, after she was buried, and hoong up boonches o' ribbins in tooken of affection for her, in this here chancel.'

'Did they? Each of her companions?'

'Ay.'

'I think it was very nice,' said Peril, after another prolonged gaze upwards. 'But'—as a doubt struck her—'why drab ribbons for beautiful young women?'

'That's only th' outside. Wind and weather, and th' action of th' air, turns 'em drab on the outside. They're all colours inside; gay and bright-red and blue, and green and pink, and yaller. And the most of 'em has a motter in gold or silver thread, worked into it, such like as, "Thou wast

dear to thy Ellen Farside," or, "With fond regrets from Robin Heseltine," and the like.'

'How do you know? You haven't ever pulled them down, have you?' exclaimed Peril, with keen reproach in her tones, for she felt deeply interested.

'Nay; why should I be clammerin' about th' roof for sich like nonsense? They wears quite rotten, and falls down every now and then, and then we see th' inside on 'em. There was one fell clap on parson's heead once, just as he was readin' out, "Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother."''

'Ah!' said Peril, with a little smile and a little sigh, as she gazed upwards again at the steadily gyrating 'tokens of affection' and mused, and felt an odd sensation steal over her heart.

'Do they put them up now, ever?' she inquired.

'Nay, there's none been hoong up for

more nor thretty year. I was here at th' hangin' o' t' last. Yon's it; but it's like all the others now,' and he pointed with his clasp-knife to a particular 'token' which was whirling sedately along with the rest. 'That was Susan Cleveland, a nice, sonsie, well-liking lass. She died o' consumption, at twenty-two.'

Peril, her head thrown back, her hands clasped before her, looked long and wistfully.

'Suppose I had lived in "former times"—those times—and had died, would they have hung up a token for me? "Well-liking" I am, in looks; but she had to be uncommonly beliked and loved by all her companions, and I am sure that could not be said of me. But I see some of the bunches are much thinner than others. Some of those "young females" had more friends, some fewer. Perhaps I might have had the

tribute of about two solitary streamers. Who knows ?

She turned away, full of thought, and wishing the man good-day, went out. Inside the church it had been cold, although so light and bright. Outside, a breath of warm wind, a gush of delicious sunshine met her, and she wandered to the south side of the building, reading on her way more epitaphs of Master Mariners, and presently she sat down on a low stone wall, from which she could see over the sea, into the exquisite, shimmering silver distance; it was verily not unworthy to compare with that

‘ Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky,’

which we all know; and Peril, as she sat thus, still and restful, felt that if she might never be sadder than she was now—might, by compacting to give up all ecstasies, all dizzy summits of bliss and emotion, lose for

ever her bitter and hard rages, her hours of despair, and be secure of an even happiness such as this, she would pay the price now, seal the bond, and feel that she had done well for herself.

A shadow fell upon the wall beside her ; there was a step in the grass near by. Startled, she looked round, and saw Mr. Trelawney.

He smiled, and lifted his hat.

‘I will not pretend not to know who you are, Miss Nowell, for I saw you with your uncle in church yesterday, and I come now from calling upon you at his house.’

‘Calling upon me?’

‘Yes, for my wife and myself. And last, but far from least, you have found out my meditating ground, and taken possession of it.’

‘Do you come here to meditate? I am not surprised to hear it, but I did not know.

that, of course. However, I give you my promise that I will never disturb you here, though it seems to me the most lovely spot I was ever in.'

'Nay, don't talk of disturbance. I find there are very few people who appreciate it; it is not likely to get overcrowded. To me, it has been a place of blessing more than once. Mr. Wistar says he thinks you are pleased with Wiswell.'

'Yes, I am. At least, "pleased" is hardly the word. I feel grateful to it.'

'That's an odd word to use about a place.'

'Is it? One ought to feel grateful to even a place in which one seems to have found rest and peace, after long bitterness and weariness.'

Peril spoke these words with a secret thrill; the man's face so drew her, so attracted her, that she was impelled, by a fine and happy instinct, to say something to him at once.

which should not be conventional—which should break the ice, and come from her soul, and not from her lips. And yet, it was something of a leap in the dark to do so. The revulsion, supposing he did not see—did not understand, would be cruel and severe; it would shake and jar her whole spiritual being. Therefore it was that she thrilled as she spoke, as one does before plunging into the sea. His answer instantly told her that this time she had divined rightly and truly. Mr. Trelawney's eyes seemed to pierce her, though with no unkindly light, as he looked at her, and replied :

‘I thought, as I saw your face yesterday, that you had suffered. But is it only weariness from which you seek relief? Your uncle, who is a very dear old friend of mine, put a letter of yours into my hand, and I own it conveyed to me an impression of something sterner than mere *ennui*.’

Her eyes were fixed upon his face, and her lips a little parted. He heard, in the vibration of her voice, and in its low tone, as she answered him, how deep and how intense was the feeling that had been stirred.

‘I said “weariness” because I was afraid you would be surprised, and think I was talking wildly; and I did not know what you would say. But now I see that you know—you have suffered too.’

‘Yes, my child, I have.’

‘Then of course you know it is not just weariness that makes one wish one could stop living, not only now, but for ever. That was what I felt—probably I shall feel it again; for I am not so stupid as to think that what I have suffered can be cured in three days, just by being in a beautiful place, and seeing new and soothing things.’

‘No, that does not cure, though it has a marvellous power of healing, sometimes; and

I can imagine that in your case, the mere contrast between this and what you have come from must be very soothing.'

'It is rest for a time, at any rate. By-and-by my work will begin again—the task that I have set myself; but just now this is enough. If anyone had said to me before I came here, that solitude, and mere quiet, and sight of the sea and the mountains would be medicine to me, I should have laughed at him. But just before you came up, I was thinking that it must be easier to believe in God here than in a city. Everything there is man's, and has the mark of his meanness upon it, like thumb-marks upon the page of a book; but here you can understand, and *believe* too, that "the sea is His, for He made it; and the strength of the hills is His also."'

'And the strength of the hills you want to gather in, I suppose, for your purpose that you speak of,' said Mr. Trelawney, smiling

again a benignant, gentle smile, though one not without a touch of cynicism in it.

‘Yes ; if I can.’

‘There is only one sort of strength, that I ever heard of, that will help us through with right, and high, and difficult purposes,’ he said. ‘It is not easy to acquire, but it is a great lever when once you have it.’

‘Oh, pray, what is it ? And does it give you wisdom, too ?’

‘Wisdom such as, I suppose, nothing else will give, for by its means alone are the eyes freed from scales, and enabled to see things as they really are, and value them at their true worth. This strength you have heard of, of course ; it is self-sacrifice—renunciation.’

Peril’s eyes had been fixed intently upon his face. Presently they dilated, then sank. She had heard his words ; now she was looking inward and pondering upon them.

They both remained silent, sitting upon

the low stone wall, with its broad, flat coping, and the sea glittered below, and the sun shone above them; the sea-birds piped and whistled, and ever and anon a puff of wind brought to their ears the low distant music of the waves. It was she who at last broke the silence.

‘Mr. Trelawney?’

‘Yes.’

‘May I ask you sometime about this renunciation—what it means? It seems to me that it is what I want.’

‘You shall ask me whenever you like. But I may tell you now, that I never yet met anyone, with any spiritual insight, who did not recognise that it was what he or she wanted. The difficulty is to get it; you can only do that by living it, and that’s where the rub comes. But let us not say anything more about this now. I am very glad I found you here this morning. If you will

let me, I will call for you this afternoon, and take you to my house to see my wife, who is an invalid, and cannot go out to make calls. Tell me no more now, lest you should repent ; but at the right time, if you come to me, I will try to help you.'

' Yes, I dare say that will be the best,' said Peril, with the docility of a child.

What he had said to her had been to her heart like bread to a famishing body. Naturally enough her untutored mind saw his meaning all distorted ; he perhaps guessed more shrewdly than she imagined the real state of things. Indeed, Peril was, with much *naïveté*, applying his words to her own desire, and trying to make the two things—renunciation, and the gratification of her intensest wish—square together ; and she thought she saw her way to it. Renunciation, she reflected, meant giving up ; what if Mr. Trelawney confirmed her views as to the

wrongness of keeping the fortune she had got? What if his superior knowledge of men and the world showed her at last a way that should be congenial not only to herself, but to Hugh, of making him master of that of which she had practically deprived him?

Fixed thus upon material things were her thoughts. She did not dream yet of the bitter sweetness of the doctrine which now for the first time seemed to come to her with some sense of meaning and reality. Nineteen—and a wild and passionate nineteen—was it to be expected that it should see that renunciation might mean even the giving up of such a darling wish as this of doing justice—making right what was wrong? It might mean, patiently abiding and bearing the burden, not casting it off and escaping from it.

Their ways lay in the same direction as far as Mr. Wistar's house, and they walked

together as far as the gate thereof, then parted.

Peril sped into the house—into the parlour, where she found Mr. Wistar.

‘Uncle, tell me about Mr. Trelawney. I have met him in the old churchyard, and he has been talking to me. I want to know about him.’

‘Well, my lass, it’s quite certain that you might make inquiries after many a worse man than Parson Trelawney, though he be a Cornishman and no Yorkshireman.’

‘Oh! I don’t want to know his county, but his history.’

‘That’s easily told, and won’t take long. He is of a good family, and was a younger son; not even a second son, but a third, or a fourth, I don’t know which, so of course he was sent into the Church—it was the fashion in those days. I’ve heard that he devoted himself very earnestly to his work, which was

in London, at first. He was curate in a great East End parish, and was doing all sorts of good ; in fact, he'd found the very work he was cut out for—it suited him down to the ground, as they say. Then he married—yes, he married.'

'Well, not unhappily ; you don't mean that ?'

'No—oh no ! Leastways, I've never heard so ; and if he had, I'm sure he'd die rather than confess it. But from the time that he married, his great work seemed to be at an end. From being devoted to people, and working amongst them, he had to turn to his wife ; he had to give to one what he'd been placing at the service of all. She was delicate in health, was Mistress Trelawney ; and of course, when a man's taken a wife, he's bound to cherish her first and foremost, I suppose, if he is a man. But it seemed a pity, somehow. It looked as if she got a great deal, and he

had to give up a great deal. They struggled on for some time, and then her health gave way entirely : the doctors said town would never do for her, and that if she didn't get away to a different air she'd very soon die. At the seaside somewhere they said she must live. He exchanged his great parish, full of courts and slums, and swarming with people, for this. They came here fifteen years ago, and I suppose no one has ever heard a word of complaint from his lips, nor a murmur of any kind, though every fool must know what a life of weariness it must have been to a man of his powers, and his grand active mind, shut up in a small village, with fishermen and the like, and no libraries, and no kindred spirits, and no anything like what he loved and was used to ; but he's a Christian and a gentleman, is Parson Trelawney, if ever there was one. Mistress Trelawney drew a prize when she got him. And so we go on.'

Peril had discovered before now that this 'And so we go on' was a favourite peroration with her uncle, frequently employed by him to give a roundness and finish to sentences which he deemed otherwise incomplete.

'He is coming to fetch me to his house this afternoon, to see Mrs. Trelawney.'

'Is he? That's friendly in him. Do you stick to them; they're quite worth it.'

Mr. Trelawney was true to his word. He called for Peril, and took her to his house, and presented her to his wife. She found Mrs. Trelawney a pale, exhausted-looking invalid, who, whether she had drawn a prize in the matter of a husband or not, seemed emphatically to have been unfortunate as regarded her own bodily health. She had a high-bred face, which was even yet beautiful; critical grey eyes, which had a mocking look in them sometimes; and a mouth in whose

expression there was more than a tinge of cynicism. Her manners were simple, and perfect in their ease and refinement. Though so fragile in looks and health, her mind was strong, and so was her will; she could exercise great power over most of those in whom it pleased her fastidious character to take an interest. Her husband had related to her his adventure of the morning, and his meeting with Peril Nowell. The recital had interested her. Peril herself interested her a great deal more when she beheld her, with her stately grace of form, and antique, pale, and passionate beauty of face.

Mrs. Trelawney was, in a great measure, what she looked—a cynic. She promised herself great pleasure and entertainment, and no little instruction in some of the secrets of human nature, from a study of Peril; and she exerted all her powers to fascinate the girl. Had she known—she learnt it afterwards—

this conquest might have been effected at much less trouble, for Peril found Mrs. Trelawney, after Mrs. Robson, Mrs. Magson and company, perfectly irresistible. With her usual eagerness and impulsiveness she told her, before she left, something of the feelings that stirred her heart ; and Mrs. Trelawney, with a smile, bade her come and see her often—she would confer a favour by doing so. Peril went away with the sense that, after all, she was young, and the world held other people as well as those, the enforced familiarity with whom had made her life a torment to her.





CHAPTER III.

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION.

NAWFORD and Nowell sat together one evening in the room of great dimensions, in the possession of which Paul had formerly rejoiced alone, and which was now their common sitting-room. The year had advanced with strides ; it was now May, bright and clear and chill, with a hot sun and a piercing wind. The brilliant sunshine enhanced the contrast, as it always does, between what had been and what was. Rejoicing nature always emphasizes and accentuates the irritation or depression of disappointment or poor prospects. Indeed, at

this present time the outlook was not a brilliant one for either of them.

It was now more than two months since old Mr. Nowell's death, and Lawford, who had watched his companion closely, though unobtrusively, and with the keenness produced by regard for him, had seen the change which had gradually come over him. Hugh had, from the first, shown a brave front to his misfortunes. It had been very much easier for him to reject Peril's overtures than it would have been for him to accept them ; nay, he was not one whit more inclined to accept them now than he had been at the time of their being made. But—and this is greatly to the point—he was now far advanced on the road towards realizing what he had given up ; and this knowledge, gradually becoming clearer and more tangible, did not make his feelings towards his cousin altogether tenderer than they had been. He had had time by now to

realize how strongly the ever-present hope of ultimate wealth and independence had buoyed him up throughout the dull, irksome years of monotonous drudgery to which his grandfather had accustomed him ; the drudgery and the dulness were there still, unabated—yea, increased : the hope of delivery from them was gone. Day by day, and week by week, as this conviction forced itself upon him, and the effects of his deed came home to him, his spirits had sunk, his resentment had grown hotter, and his sense of injustice had rankled more strongly. Mrs. Robson, moved as she rarely was moved, had besought him with tears in her eyes, and, so to speak, on her knees, to come and make his home with her, and share her income. She loved him, she told him, as if he had been her son ; he had better come and partake of what she had ; to share it with him was the only pleasure she could now know. Her income was only left to her for

her life. If he would not come and help her to spend it, she would only save it up, to leave him what she could of it at her death. With a somewhat dreary smile Hugh had thanked her, and declined, as steadfastly as before he had declined Peril's overtures. He had health and strength, he said, and secured to him he had enough to live upon : he could not accept further help save what he earned for himself, without loss of honesty and self-respect.

He did not know, he said, whether he should remain at the works or not : he besought her not to trouble herself about him, as he had no doubt he would get on very well. And then he had removed himself and his own special belongings from Great North Street to Barton Street, and by-and-by, blinds down in the upper windows, and shutters closed in the lower ones, testified that his former house was empty ; that is, there was no more any master or mistress in

it, but only a man and his wife, living in the kitchen regions, who took care of it 'until further orders.'

This evening, Nowell seemed to have made no resistance to the cloud that oppressed his spirits. Usually he showed fight whenever the demon of depression attacked him. Perhaps his occupation had something to do with his present dark and brooding look. He was sorting papers contained in a desk: some of the papers he tore to pieces, and others he laid aside for consideration. There had been a long silence, broken only by the rustling of these papers, and the sound as he tore them across. Paul sat in the window, reading and smoking.

'Look here, Paul,' observed Hugh, suddenly tossing a sheet of paper across to him. 'I was going to be a great statesman once—a lawgiver and reformer, as you may perceive by that.'

Paul picked the paper up, and glanced over it. It was a 'Scheme for reforming the Representative System of Great Britain and Ireland.'

'Humph! It certainly seems comprehensive enough!' remarked Lawford, after skimming through it.

'Doesn't it? That was what I was going to do when I was Prime Minister. That's all up now,' and he laughed a short laugh.

'That has had to be "all up" with more people than you. I suppose it's what every young man means to be who takes any interest in politics, and thinks of giving any time to them. The young men may be counted by millions, I suppose—hundreds of thousands at any rate. The Premier is one, or two, if you allow for the leader of the Opposition as well.'

'I meant to carry women's suffrage, and effect a radical reform in the land laws, too,'

pursued Nowell. 'And of course, to make a clean sweep of a whole lot of abuses, and to do something for higher education. And then Ireland. I was going to make Ireland contented for ever by one grand act of justice. Gain over the priests by establishing their religion, and——'

'You must indeed have been enthusiastic if you had got as far as that.'

'I was ; in fact, I fancy that enthusiasm is a small word by which to express my state of mind. It is as well that circumstances prevent my immediate return to Parliament, for it seems to me I should have made an awful fool of myself if I had got there.'

Lawford made no reply ; and Hugh, presently stopping in his occupation of sorting out papers, said, leaning his elbows on the table, and looking with some curiosity at his friend :

'I can't make you out, Lawford. Did you never have such ambitions? You are older

than I am by a good many years. You must have gone through the same sort of thing.'

Lawford repressed a smile at this tone of Hugh, as who should say that his period of storm and stress was over and done with, and he was able to view men and things from a vantage-ground of experience.

'No, I never did,' he said; 'I never had any fancy that way—for politics, and your sort of thing. There have been times when I have stood before some picture that took one's breath away with its beauty, or when I have heard some music that made me feel that after all some people had been vouchsafed a dim idea of the nature of what they call the music of the spheres. When I have had a shock of that kind, you know, I have felt afterwards that it must be fine to be the man who can paint the picture, or compose the music. I dare say you will thoroughly despise such a fiddling, finikin sort of ambition——'

‘That’s pure spite, because you know I have not an artist’s temperament. But I am not a block of wood for all that. I agree with you that it would be fine to be the artist or the musician, or to write the novel or the poem that shows people their own nature, reveals them to themselves, and makes artificial folk for once in a way feel real ; laugh real laughs, and shed real tears. But that is not given to one in ten thousand.’

‘Exactly ; and as I have always felt very keenly that I was not that one—just your feeling about the premiership, in fact—I have always tried to keep cool. Indeed, I have always found it quite as much as I could do to trudge along through life and keep my hands clean at the same time. I have always had rather a fancy for clean hands, in every sense of the word ; and, not being a genius, I thought it best to attend to one thing at a time.’

‘That’s another way of hinting that you

wish everyone else could say as much,' observed Nowell, with a laugh not altogether free from embarrassment ; not that he was in any way conscious of having hands in the least soiled, but he had a conviction that Lawford, careless fellow though he seemed and in many ways was, was yet in others a rigid puritan, and had played his part in life not altogether discredibly — that, despite poverty and reverses, and lack of joy and hope, he had never, to gain a pound, or even a hundred pounds, descended to the faintest breach of truth or honesty in the past, and that even now, in the present, he was plodding on at his poor and uncongenial work at Darkingford, and living on as little as he could possibly make suffice for his wants, in order to give his lad as much of the education and training of a gentleman as he could in any way afford. Doubtless, it may be said, it was his duty to do his best by his own son.

Naturally it was ; but when one has an income of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum, it is astonishing into how narrow a compass one's duties towards one's nearest, as well as one's private pleasures, may dwindle, and that rapidly. Nowell, however, had no child to provide for : the woman he loved had refused him ; he was free to begin the world as he best could, if ever man was.

‘No, it isn’t, old fellow,’ said Paul tranquilly, in answer to Nowell’s last shaft. ‘It’s simply a way of describing my own very commonplace career. But I think it is a thousand pities that your much more distinguished and ambitious views should be cut down as they have been. You might’—he smiled with a certain mixture of shrewdness and kindliness—‘have made a very excellent borough member—one of the Darkingford ones, for instance—even if you had never got to be First Lord of the Treasury. And to

tell the truth, Hugh, I don't know if you have the right to remain as poor as you are.'

'Right!' exclaimed Nowell indignantly. 'You speak as if I liked it. What choice had I?'

'Just the one of stooping your head and letting poor Miss Nowell provide for you.'

Hugh looked up suddenly, with no want of either animation or resentment in his expression.

'Don't say that again, Paul,' he said, with excitement, though he restrained it. 'If I had been left absolutely penniless, instead of comparatively so, I would never have submitted to *that*.'

'No; submission comes hard to people like you, I'm aware. Because she cared for you, and you knew it, and, as you fancied, could not pay her back, but would have had to take the bare, unvarnished money, and

say "Thank you" for it, you could not submit.'

'Well!' interrupted Hugh passionately. 'And do you mean to say that there was any reason, in the heavens above or the earth beneath, which could make it expedient, or even desirable or right, for me to do that?'

'It seems to me that there was one very good one.'

'I wonder what?'

'Simply this—that, by doing so, you would have lightened the burden which is now so intolerable to her; would have helped to remove the curse which she feels has been bequeathed to her; you would have made her life happier; to put it into two or three words, you might have done it for her sake, if you didn't care to for your own.'

Nowell was at first silent, his brow darkening, his eyes fixed upon the table; at last he said moodily :

‘You may be right, but I’m not equal to that. It may be pride; it may be self-respect——’

‘Or even selfishness.’

‘Very well,’ said Hugh, almost sullenly; ‘call it by the worst name you can. Call it selfishness. Was there no selfishness on her side, when she went in a rage, and blabbed to my grandfather what she knew would make him hate me, and drive him wild with anger and suspicion? What was that?’

‘It was as near madness as anything else. It was selfishness too, of course. But what has that to do with it?’

‘A great deal, I should say. She did that, and then got this money. In a fit of contrition, as wild as the one of rage, she offered me the better part of all she had. A word, or a look, might have set her off into another fit of rage. When I had stooped to pick up her favour, she might at any

moment have spurned me, or wanted it back again.'

'You wrong her entirely. She would so have felt the magnanimity of what you had done, that she would have been tongue-tied for ever. Her gratitude would have kept her temper within bounds ; she would have been forced to believe in greatness and generosity, and that would have carried her leagues along the road towards a saner view of life, and would have given her an existence with more sweetness and light in it than hers has contained, so far.'

'I dare say that is a very fine and exalted view of the case. Unfortunately, you see, I have to think of what practical men say of such things——'

'I'll be hanged if I see what the practical man, fine creature though he undoubtedly is, especially the Darkingford type of him—but I'll be hanged, I say, if I see what he has

got to do meddling between you and your cousin.'

'I know what all the world would have said if I had taken money from Peril—accepted a pension from her, and then gone and—married—somebody else,' said Nowell, with difficulty bringing his sentence to an end.

'And what on earth would it have mattered what they had said, so long as you and Miss Nowell had arranged things to your own satisfaction, and consonantly with the demands of justice?'

'It is of no use talking. Perhaps, if it would have really been to my satisfaction, I shouldn't have cared so much what the world said. But it would have been hateful to me. I prefer to be as poor as a church mouse, and keep my self-respect.'

And let Miss Nowell sink under her shame and grief, and the weight of her un-

welcome twenty thousand a year, which brings us back to the original point,' said Paul drily. 'Altogether, I think it is a matter we don't agree upon.'

'I certainly cannot go with you in any such idea, that I confess,' said Nowell decidedly, perhaps because he had more than an inkling that we have sometimes to consult other interests than that lofty one, our own self-respect, when we wish to meet the demands of justice with generosity. He fastened up his desk and observed: 'I am going out. We have a last meeting at the Debating Society to-night, and I'm going on the chance that Miss Hankinson may be there. Her father has intimated that my visits at his house had better not be quite so frequent now.'

There was wrath and bitterness, intense if repressed, in his tones, and without looking at Lawford again, he went out of the room.

‘Poor lad!’ soliloquized Paul, watching him down the street. ‘He’s no philosopher, and he has a lot of troubles before him. Unless I am mistaken, some plan is churning and revolving in his mind. If he succeeds in finding his Margaret, and escorting her home, I shall probably hear the result of his conversation on their return. . . . As for me,’ Lawford concluded within himself, as he rose with the intention of getting his hat and going out for a stroll, ‘I am a complete and finished fool, whatever Hugh may be; there’s no doubt of that. I’m delighted that he scouts the idea of making it up with his cousin; and I wonder if I shall, by any chance, catch a glimpse of her this summer, if Katty and Humphrey make up their minds to go to the Grange.’

He shut the front-door after him, and turned out in search of the nearest approach to ‘country’ that was to be found, some

smoke-dimmed fields, through which gurgled a dye-polluted stream, and on whose grass some gloomily-tinted sheep and cows browsed in a melancholy manner. Amongst these exhilarating natural surroundings he wandered till twilight turned the dinginess into blackness, and then, taking a circuitous route into a broad, lighted thoroughfare, he gradually traced his way home.





CHAPTER IV.

WITH THE HEART—AGAINST THE HEAD.

HUGH NOWELL went out, feeling vexed and perturbed. He had made up his mind what to do, after much inward debate ; and, once having resolved, had soon succeeded in persuading himself that there was something decidedly fine in the line he was about to take ; if it was not positively heroic, it was, he felt, something very like it. He had fully intended, when he began turning out the contents of his little desk, to go further, and tell Paul all about his future plans, as well as enlarge upon his past hopes. Then the con-

versation had taken that turn which he had not found particularly agreeable. He was young ; he was proud ; he was self-willed ; but he was intelligent too, and not devoid of a certain sense of the fitness of things. After Lawford had been talking for a little while, Nowell had been unable to deny to himself that his friend had right on his side. Like a revelation it flashed upon him that probably that was the real view to be taken of his duty. It was not at all what he desired. He wanted, if he was wronged, to take high ground and do something remarkable, so that everyone should see to what he had been reduced by his relative's injustice, and should be obliged also to own admiringly with what an undaunted front he met his misfortunes. Paul had said that that was not the view to take at all—that he ought to think of his cousin—ought, out of consideration for her, to humble himself and take money from her.

As he paced quickly towards town, Hugh got very wroth, while these ideas and other similar ones fermented in his mind.

‘ Did she have any consideration for me ? Did she think of me ? Was there no selfishness on her side ? ’ he said angrily, within himself ; and then it seemed to him as if he heard Lawford’s voice, saying just what he knew Lawford would say in answer to such an apostrophe, in low, lazy tones :

‘ I never said that she wasn’t selfish ; but, my dear fellow, will you make it out that you are to take for your standard of right and wrong the behaviour of an “ unlessoned girl,” and make it out that what she does in her woman’s passions is fit matter for your re- crimination, and that out of your man’s reflections you can get no better counsel than “ one ill turn deserves another ” ? that you will do the ill turn, and say it is right, because she had behaved ill to you ? ’

He did not like the ideas at all which were called up by this imaginary harangue of Lawford's. They galled him, and made him wince and feel uncomfortable, and conveyed to his mind a disagreeable little lurking feeling that he was not behaving so well as he might have done. Poor Nowell had the failing common to most of us—trait, perhaps, rather than failing—he disliked to be insignificant, and to play a small part; and there was something so pitiably wanting in distinction and significance in first being disinherited, and then accepting an allowance from the heiress. So utterly poor and obscure and revolting did such a part seem, that—here he felt a gleam of relief—there must be something unsound in the reasoning which would make it out that such a course was the right one. Paul Lawford was a very good fellow—in many ways a very fine fellow; he liked him, but after all, he was not practical.

He rather prided himself on being not practical. He sneered at practical men ; he could only see things from his own amateurish, sentimental point of view. He, Nowell, would tell Margaret—ask her advice. She would have something warmer to say ; she would bid him go on his way, and triumph over adverse circumstances. His heart beat ; his eyes glowed ; insensibly he raised his head somewhat higher as he thought all this. By the time he had reached the room in which the debate was to be held, he had managed to shake off some of his discomfort, and to reinstate in a great measure the notion that he was a fine young fellow, very hardly used by circumstances, and that he was going to look his misfortunes in the face in a manner both brave and original.

In the meeting-room he found what he wished to see—Margaret Hankinson ; he sat down beside her, and though she greeted

him almost silently, she yet managed to make him feel that he filled all her thoughts.

When the meeting was over, he got also the opportunity he so ardently coveted—that of having her to himself.

‘Is anyone coming for you?’ he whispered.

‘No; my father is engaged with the lawyers. I said I would most likely take a hansom——’

‘But you won’t do that. You will let me walk home with you. I came just for the chance of it—for nothing else in the world. I have something very particular to say to you, and you know he has hinted that I had better make myself scarce at your house.’

Margaret’s face was downcast as she whispered in reply :

‘I know. I will do what you like.’

So they said good-night to such of their companions as came in their way, and then left the building. It was dark, being after

ten o'clock, but the streets were lighted, and as much thronged as in the day-time.

'Take my arm, Margaret,' he said, 'and let us go slowly. I have a great deal to say to you.'

Margaret, who had so firmly and decidedly resisted him when he urged his suit a short time before, made absolutely no opposition to this behest, which was indeed something like a mandate. She placed her arm within his, and they walked slowly—very slowly. He had said to her, at the time when she had refused him, that, amidst all her reasons for that refusal, she had not alleged as one of them that she did not love him. He had given her to understand that he believed she did love him, and that he meant to win her. He had been over-confident. Had their relative circumstances continued the same, he would have found the winning of her a far, far harder task than he imagined,

but those circumstances had entirely changed, and, on the few occasions on which she had seen him of late, she had scarcely tried to conceal that she looked upon him as apart from other men, as more to her, and dearer than others. The questions she had asked him, the things she had said to him, the thousand little signs and tokens she had vouchsafed had been enough ; he knew that he was right, and that he was first and supreme with her.

They turned out of one of the principal streets into a quieter one, running parallel with it, where conversation was more possible, and there was no crowd.

‘ I am so glad you came to-night,’ said he. ‘ As I said, if I had not thought and hoped that you would come, I should not have gone near the place.’

‘ I felt sure you would expect to see me, and so I went,’ said she gently. ‘ Not because

I wished to go. Everything is so changed to me of late, and so sad. I feel as if I wished for nothing more.'

Her voice trembled. What she was thinking of was the sadness which had fallen upon her since the discovery of her father's dangerous and illegitimate speculations in Mr. Nowell's business, and also her own sadness in Hugh's fallen fortunes. She had spoken unawares out of her heart, which was just then very full of these things—almost as if she had spoken to herself—in reality she addressed herself to the love which lay between them, and which, though unconfessed on her part, they both knew to exist. He accepted the unconscious admission, and seized upon it eagerly.

'Sad to you, are they? Things are sad to you, Margaret! God bless you for it!'

There was a little silence, for his words had told her what she had admitted. She did

not much care, and felt in nowise dismayed. She had been telling herself lately that she did love him, and that he was now poor, dejected, and unhappy : if her love was to be of any use or any good to him, she must own it ; she must let him know that it was his, and ready to serve him.

‘ Tell me, Margaret,’ he said, as they paced still more slowly along the almost deserted street—‘ tell me, was I not right that night—you do love me, though you were so hard to me ?’

‘ I never meant to have admitted it,’ said she slowly, and with a last remnant of reluctance and resistance ; ‘ but everything is altered now. If I am to be of any use in your life, I **must** speak. You were right ; I do love you, and I always shall. If it gives you any comfort or any joy, you may know that my heart is yours.’

‘ Ah, Margaret, it is worth all I have lost,

and a great deal more, to know this ; now I can battle through anything. I do not care what befalls. I can face all that comes.'

Still not quite ceasing their onward movement, as they went lingeringly along, he drew her hands upwards to his breast, and stooped and kissed her lips. Her face wore a look, could he have read it, that was half-joy, half-sorrow. Margaret Hankinson was a woman who had had a high purpose and great pride, and in confessing her love for him her conscience told her that she had not showed altogether fair play to her higher self and to her larger aims. He, being one, had stepped as it were into the chamber of her life, and had looked at her, and held out his hand to her ; and she, after a regretful look or two towards the field on which she had intended to carry out her life's battle, for the good of others and her own happiness, had turned her back upon

that field, had left that secure prospect, put her hand within his, and left her hopes, her aspirations, and her high desires. While his voice thanked her, and his lips kissed her, and the joy of the moment thrilled her, a bodeful voice in the depths of her heart seemed to say, 'It is not well done.' Well done or ill done, it was done. She had spoken, confessed, yielded ; there was now no drawing back, and she had the steady purpose, now that she had admitted her love, of carrying out the thing to the end. If he asked her to come and be his wife, and make his home for him in his changed circumstances, why, she would do so—she would go to him. It was only right. Since she had elected to give up her cherished hopes and plans, she would not do the thing by half, but altogether. Full of a resolution of this kind, she felt half-triumphant, half - tremulous, half - cowardly, half-brave, and very much in love with Hugh

Nowell ; and she began very speedily to reap the fruits of half-heartedness.

‘ You said you had a great deal to tell me,’ she said softly. ‘ Begin now, Hugh, and let me hear what it is.’

‘ You remember the conditions of my grandfather’s will ?’

‘ Perfectly.’

‘ As long as I chose to remain in Darkingford, I was to have a post in the works.’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Well, I am not going to remain in Darkingford. I am going abroad, and that immediately.’

‘ Going—abroad !’ she echoed faintly, and she stopped in her walk, and clung to his arm, for she felt as if she were reeling with surprise and dismay. ‘ What do you mean ?’

‘ I mean that I am going to begin at the beginning. Australia is the country I have decided upon going to. As you know, I

have a hundred pounds a year secure. With that, no one need ever starve. I have also some money of my own, which I have managed to save. Perhaps I shall go out as a working-man—indeed, I have almost decided to do so. I want to see what roughing it really means. I shall set to work as soon as I find something suitable. They say—I hear it everywhere—that skilled artisans are what are wanted in the colonies—men who can turn their hands to something, and none of your clerks and counter-jumpers. Before I go I shall very likely learn some handicraft. I flatter myself that I am capable of doing that. Then I shall go away, and see if I can't set up a little business there by degrees; and then, Margaret, in a few years I shall come back, and take you out as my wife. What do you say to that ?'

'I—I—Hugh, I am so *amazed*—I do not know what to say,' she stammered, quite

crushed and overcome by his announcement. This was indeed different from the picture painted by her dreams, in which she had been by his side, with him, helping him and supporting him, and at least feeling that even if her efforts to improve the future of the masses had abruptly and ignominiously come to an end, she was visibly bettering and alleviating the present lot of one man, and that a worthy one.

‘You are surprised,’ he said. ‘I thought you would be. But when you think of it and consider it, I am sure you will see how good the plan is. Since I decided upon this course I have been quite content, almost happy. I think you’ll own that it is better—ay, and higher, if you come to think of it—than Lawford’s ignoble proposal.’

‘Why, what was that?’ she asked, almost breathlessly.

‘That I should crawl to Peril’s feet, and

tell her that I would thank her kindly to spare me a little out of her superabundance,' said Nowell defiantly, all his deep-seated anger and irritation flaming forth, now that he gave words to his rankling feelings. 'A pretty idea !'

'*Ask* your cousin for money, Hugh! I could not have credited Mr. Lawford with such a suggestion. He struck me as being so proud and fastidious in his ideas about such things.'

'He did not say *ask*, exactly,' said Hugh, wishing to be just; it was one of his best qualities. 'You know, that afternoon of the funeral, Peril tried to make me say that I would come to an arrangement, and share her fortune. She begged it—implored it, even; and was very much cut up when I refused. But I felt it better in every way not to yield.'

'You would not consent! Oh, Hugh, the

poor girl must have felt that she was in a manner accursed.'

These words were disagreeable to Hugh, for they were an echo of those other words of Lawford's, which he professed to have heard with indignant contempt. He said hastily :

' Peril is not a girl to have those feelings long. Soon enough we shall hear of her amusing herself famously at Wiswell, and awaking to find herself a great heiress and a great beauty, with the world, especially the unmarried men of it, grovelling at her feet. She will thank me then for what I have done.'

Margaret was silent ; her mind was filled with widely varying feelings ; but she said at last :

' And *must* you go ?'

He was disappointed that she did not rather say, ' Oh, you noble Spartan ! How I admire you !' But he repressed his feelings.

‘I have tried to think I could stay ; but it is useless ; I cannot. Every day I spend here makes me feel bitterer, and more wretched and more dissatisfied. This plan, when it came into my head, was like a gleam of light—like dawn after a dark night. I said to myself, “The question is solved. If Margaret will bless me by her promise to wait for me, I shall go content and hopeful. If she refuses, I shall have to go still ; but I shall sever myself from every tie that now binds me to England and what has been my home.” I felt that my life-problem was solved at last ; and the solution only waits for your sanction, Margaret.’

Again a short silence, till at last she said, with passionate protest sounding in her low tones :

‘Oh, Hugh, if I were just three years younger ! *You* have all life, all manhood, and ever so much of your youth still before

you. *My* youth, such youth as a woman has, is past now, and over. Just think of it; supposing you return, say in five or six years, and find me an old woman, while you are yet—— No; go, if you feel it best, and I dare say it is—go; but go free from any tie to me.'

'That I never will. At least, never, so long as you own you love me! I'll wait here, if you forbid me to go; but I'll never give you up.'

'You think far, far too much of me. Oh, Hugh, forgive me! I hate myself for it; but I somehow cannot *believe* that it will last. I cannot believe that you will go out into the world, and stay away for years, perhaps, and come back to me with your love undimmed. And yet, if you did not, my life and my hope would be gone, and that is why I say, Go; but go free.'

'Never, Margaret! You don't know what

my heart is made of. I see you don't trust me yet ; but you may as well, my dear—you may as well give in at once. Almost the first time I saw you I said to myself, “She shall be my wife ;” and I have said it many a hundred times since. Give up your suspicions, Margaret. You owned that you loved me ; a woman in love makes herself happy and secure in her faith in the person she loves. Look at me now, and say what you see to distrust in me.’

He stopped her, and they looked at one another in the flickering yellow shine of the street-lamp. His dark young face was calm and bright ; his lips were closed with a certain air of purpose, of indomitable resolution, which sat well on them, and which comes easily to youthful lips in general. His eyes sought hers with a look at once loverly and protecting, which pierced her through and through. No ; she could not, and would not,

doubt him. He meant it, and his was no light and flimsy nature ; and he was good and handsome, and desperately in love with her, as she was with him. Should she not believe that he knew best what to do with his own life ? Had he ever proved himself unsteady or unstable before ? No. Then why should he be so now ? She had grown pale. Her eyes were filled with tears ; her refined and rather worn face was transfigured into absolute beauty during the few moments of keen emotional life which she, along with him, passed through just then. She looked into his face and into his eyes, as if she would read his very soul, and said at last, grasping both his hands in hers :

‘ Be it so ! I yield to you. Go, if you must go, and take my promise with you, and my heart ; and do not forget that you hold all my life and all my happiness in the hollow of your hand.’

‘ I hope I may be forgotten of God myself, if I ever do, for one moment, lose sight of that !’ he said solemnly.

And so their compact was made, and Nowell returned home and found that Lawford had also come in from his walk, and therewith sat down and told him all that had happened.





CHAPTER V.

OLD ORDER CHANGETH.

‘**A**ND you really mean,’ said Lawford, when he had patiently heard out the exposition of Nowell’s views and intentions—‘you really mean that you have got engaged to Miss Hankinson, on the understanding that you are straightway to learn a handicraft and go to Australia, and leave her behind, while you ply it for a living?’

‘That is the understanding. Margaret, you must remember, has never held the same views that many women do. She said—I have heard her say it many a time—that if

ever she did marry, her husband should be a man who wanted a helpmate, not a doll.'

'I fail to see how she is to be a helpmate, while she is at home in England and you at the Antipodes. You ought, in justice to her, to let her carry out her theories to their logical conclusion, and go out with you as your wedded wife.'

Nowell's face flushed. Lawford watched him with a smile, half kindness, half shrewdness, playing on his lips.

'The youngster is muddled in his ideas, or rather he shrinks from reducing them to practice. He wants to marry her, and he is pleased to think that she fancies him, poor as he is now ; but he has got the real bourgeois notions that might be expected from his upbringing and education. He wants to see the house, and the tables and chairs, and the pots and pans, with a certain something to

replenish them with, before he will let her go with him. And she, if I am not much mistaken, would sooner follow him with a little bundle and a crust of bread, than sit by and wait till the semi-detached villa is ready and furnished, with a parlour-maid to open the door and a cook in the kitchen.'

'I laid it all before her,' Hugh said. 'I explained what I felt about it. First, she wanted there to be no agreement between us ; but I would not consent to that. Then she turned round, like the noble creature she is, and said I was to go, and she would be true to me.'

'Well, she is either a very careless and reckless woman, or a very noble one—one in a thousand !' said Lawford. 'I confess it would be more than I could summon courage to do—get engaged to a woman in that way, and leave her alone to wait while I went on adventures ; but since she is willing, and

you feel equal to it, why, I wish you both well.'

Little more was said between them. Nowell felt in his heart of hearts that Lawford, though no whit changed in his demeanour, did not cordially approve of the course he was taking; and he himself, although flushed with the elation of victory—victory over his own hard circumstances and over Margaret's unwillingness—was not altogether satisfied with himself. He could not quite banish from his mind that scene which had taken place between him and his cousin on the afternoon of his grandfather's funeral. He could not altogether forget Peril's despair, and the hard and brutal things that Mrs. Robson had said to her; the worn and sad expression of her countenance as she lay fainting on the sofa; the eager hope with which she had turned to him afterwards, and the blank and stony look with which at last,

when she found him obdurate, she had turned away. What was he doing now? For what might he not, in the end, be answerable?

‘Pooh!’ he said to himself at last, trying to shake off his feeling of discomfort; ‘one had to be practical, not visionary; one had to act, not dream. The world would never stand still to let two persons sentimentalize on their own affairs. He had been literally cast upon the world with his life in his own hands, and he was going to see what he could make of it.’

At breakfast the following morning he said to Lawford:

‘I am going down to the office with you this morning for the last time. I am going to take leave of Hankinson, and tell him I have got no more to do with his business.’

‘And have you selected the handicraft that you intend to pursue?’ inquired Lawford drily.

‘Certainly I have. As soon as I have squared accounts with Hankinson, I am going to a joiner’s yard that I know of. When I was a lad, many a shilling’s worth of wood have I bought from him, and many an hour have I stood with my feet in the shavings, watching his men at their work. He knows me well. I shall ask him to let me learn his trade in his shed ; and when I know enough to earn a living with it, I shall sail for the Antipodes.’

‘So ! It is an honourable calling, and one which no man need be ashamed to own for his own,’ said Lawford calmly, and beginning, despite himself, to feel a good deal of interest in the success of the experiment.

The two young men entered the well-known office together. Mr. Hankinson was not yet come, and Nowell devoted himself to his usual work until the manager’s arrival, when he immediately went to his office.

Even in the few weeks which had elapsed since Mr. Nowell's death, Hankinson had acquired a new air of importance and business-like reserve, and had all the demeanour of a man whose time is so much occupied that he feels he has a right to resent frivolous interruptions.

Perhaps he thought Hugh Nowell's entrance now was an interruption of such a nature, for he looked up with a sharp expression betokening anything but welcome, and said shortly :

‘ Well, sir, what can I do for you ?’

‘ Nothing, thank you,’ said Nowell tranquilly, ‘ except to spare me a few moments of your valuable time. I have something to say to you.’

Hankinson was silent, fumbling among some papers, and not very successfully trying to look easily unconcerned.

‘ I have come to wish you good-morning,’

continued Nowell. 'I am not going to remain in the office any longer.'

'What? Leaving us? This is very unexpected—I may say, unthought of,' said Hankinson, raising his head with a look of greater animation.

'Is it?' was Hugh's indifferent answer. 'I should think, though, it can hardly be surprising. There is not much to tempt me to remain, is there?'

'I don't know, Mr. Nowell. Some persons might think that a place, and a certain provision for life——'

'Might compensate amply for the loss of everything else. I think differently, Mr. Hankinson. I have decided to learn a trade and leave the country, and I think it only right to tell you so. One hundred pounds a year I take under my grandfather's will. I will see that the solicitors always have an address to which they can send me a cheque

when due. And, one other thing. Did you see your daughter last night, when she came in ?

‘N—no!’ faltered Mr. Hankinson, with a sudden look of apprehension.

‘Then she has not told you what passed between us. She has promised that, some day, when I am in a position to return and claim her, she will be my wife. I would not for the world have you deceived in the matter ; therefore it is that I have come to tell you this. And so I wish you good-morning. I am sure my cousin’s interests are safe in your hands.’

Mr. Hankinson, too astounded to reply, had let him go, while he sat, as it were, spell-bound at his desk, gazing after him.

Hugh passed out into the outer office, where a number of other clerks sat—the place which he had known so long, since he had been a lad of fifteen, at which mature age he

had had to 'turn to,' to use his grandfather's expression, and begin his career as a man of business.

And for ten years—it was just a little more than ten years ago—he had been kept persistently and steadily at that one pursuit—the learning how to make money. He had endured it, hoping for better things, looking for the dawn of a brighter day. He was worse off now than he had been then. He felt nothing but bitterness as his gaze wandered round the dingy room, with its smoky walls and ceiling and dusty windows. But, at any rate, he was going to be free of it and rid of it for ever. There were one or two of the men to whom he wished to say good-bye. He went up to them and told them he was going away, and that he offered them his good wishes, and asked for theirs in return. One and all returned his farewell heartily. They had all liked him, and had looked

forward with satisfaction to the time when he should rule over them ; and many of them had felt anything but enthusiastic about the unexpected change which had given them Hankinson as absolute chief for an indefinite term. Nevertheless, the parting was dry, composed, and unemotional, as partings between Englishmen are wont to be. The hand-shakes were all over, the little sententious speeches all made.

‘I shall see you this evening,’ Nowell observed to Lawford, who nodded ; and the lad then picked up his hat and left the place of which he ought to have been the master at that moment—left it, to begin the world anew.

It was still the same brilliant, treacherous May weather ; the sun shone dazingly into the grey Darkingford streets as Nowell took his way from the place where ‘Nowell’s factories’ stood, to another quarter of the

town, nearer to where his house had been. He soon found himself in a broad and busy thoroughfare, one of the most fashionable in Darkingford, if such a word as 'fashion' may be applied to so rough and dingy a provincial town. Turning presently down a side street, he came to a pair of large wooden gates, behind which, rising above a long, red brick wall, stacks of wood and piles of timber attested to the presence of a large joiner's and timber-merchant's yard. On the gates were painted up, 'James Mitchell, carpenter, joiner, and timber-merchant.' Nowell pushed one of them open, and found himself standing in the spacious yard, with its many sheds, both open and closed. There was the pleasant odour of fresh sawdust all around, saw-pits, and a thick carpeting of curly shavings, together with some men in white aprons, working, and moving to and fro.

Nowell was soon seen. A respectable-looking foreman came forward, touched his cap, and said :

‘ Good-morning, Mr. Nowell. What is it for you ?’

‘ I want to see Mr. Mitchell, if he is in.’

‘ He is out just now ; but I can take any orders.’

‘ I have no orders to give. I want to know if he will take me as a pupil, and teach me to be a carpenter, and what he will charge me for the lessons.’

The foreman smiled. Nowell was not the first amateur who had come to them with such a request.

‘ What particular branch is it you want to know, Mr. Nowell, because——’

‘ All the branches,’ replied the other. ‘ I’m going to make it my trade, and go out to Australia.’

‘Oh, you’ll think better of that, sir, before you have learnt your trade.’

‘I doubt it. And it’s of no use calling me “sir,” and “Mr. Nowell,” any more, Hunt. All is changed with me since last I saw you. I am nearly a pauper, and I’m not going to learn carpentering for amusement, but to earn my living by it. So let us understand—what will it cost me, and can I come to-morrow morning to start?’

The foreman did begin to understand, less from Nowell’s words than from his looks and tones, that it was not play, but actual and veritable earnest which had brought him there. He had only known the young man as an occasional visitor, who showed a neat hand, and had a wonderfully good idea—for a gentleman—of how to put a thing together, and of how to handle a plane or a chisel. Of his circumstances he knew little or nothing, but he perceived that though Hugh stood

before him now, dressed in the same way as usual, and looking, too, very much the same, yet there was a difference in him—a hardness and yet a carelessness in his words, and a look in his lips and eyes as if he meant work.

‘I hate artificial things,’ Nowell went on. ‘Grinding away in an office, on a clerk’s stool, with no other prospect before you till the end of your life, but to sit on the same stool, and get the same salary; obliged to dress as if you were what you are not—a man of means—and asked to people’s houses as their equal, who would show you a horse-whip, or the door, if you asked for one of their daughters. I’ve come to the conclusion that a sack of tools and a white jacket, and my own free will to consult, and no one else’s pleasure—that’s the thing for me, and that is why I’ve come here.’

‘Well, I don’t know that you’ve done

amiss,' said the foreman, in a neutral tone. He was a little surprised at the burst of eloquence. 'And if you'll come along into this office, we'll soon settle terms, and everything else.'

Nowell followed him into one of the little wooden shanties, which was fitted up as an office; and there it was soon arranged that, on condition of his paying a certain sum of money, he was to be initiated into the art and mystery of a carpenter's and joiner's craft—that his lessons were to begin the following morning at six o'clock, and were to continue until he was qualified to earn his living by exercising the said craft. He placed a sovereign on the desk to 'pay his footing,' and went away, having concluded the compact, and for the moment driven away all disagreeable reflections. He had got work, and—though he did not say so to himself—he had the feeling that when

Peril came to hear of his proceedings, he would have got his revenge.

It was now only just noon. He had the rest of the day before him. What should he do with it? He would go and call upon Margaret, and tell her what he had done.

He found her in, and was ushered into the sitting-room which Lawford had described to his sister as being so pleasant. It was empty, but there were the signs of her presence everywhere about it—in the open piano, the little work-basket, the book laid upon a small table, with an ivory paper-cutter marking the page—in the writing-things spread out upon the writing-table. Hugh moved gently amongst them all, with a delicious sense that now they concerned him as much as they did her. It was not often that he would have the chance of being thus amidst her belongings; let him make much of it while he had it. He went to the window,

where there was a wire-work stand containing a collection of plants and ferns which flourished, because she tended them carefully with her own hands. He touched and stroked the leaves of one and another of them, and drew in with a deep inspiration the atmosphere of the whole room, which seemed to breathe of her. He might be stiff-necked and determined in his own way; he might be self-seeking in his love, with unconscious youthful egotism, and resolved rather to make her bend to his will and see things as he saw them, than to be in any way led by her; but, for all that, she was the star and the centre around which all his thoughts revolved—all his hopes and all his wishes. She knew it, and it was this—this knowledge that she was needful to him and delightful to him, which fascinated Margaret, and bowed her strong will, and made her yield where she inwardly wished to resist.

For—a woman may stand alone; it is useless and futile to say that she cannot. She may stand alone, work alone, strive alone, and be happy alone, even as a man may, and more easily so of late years than ever before, thanks partly to those of her sisters who have braved the storm of obloquy and unclean malignity which has assailed their work, and partly to a deeply-seated, fundamental change in social opinion upon this question; she may, then, stand alone, and be happy alone, so long as she is free from the feeling that she is wanted by some man whom she really cares for. But let only that man show her that he cares for her, that she is something to him—a power or an influence in his life—and straightway she cares for that more than for anything else. ‘Her desire is unto him,’ in the sense that he and his concerns are more to him than anything else in the world. Surely it is fitting

and it is right that it should be so. And there are some women who take to the change and the thralldom kindly; but there are others who, while they cannot resist it, do not altogether love the yoke, and of such was Margaret Hankinson.

She presently came into the room with an expression of hesitation, a shrinking reserve in her eyes, and a timidity in her whole aspect, which he had never seen there before. His heart, too, throbbled; it seemed as if last night had been but a preliminary—a preface; as if now, this morning, in the clear light of day, and now only, came the full revelation of what had happened.

‘Margaret!’ he said, in a low voice, as he went towards her with outstretched hands.

She did not speak, but put her own into them, and he said:

‘I have told your father all about it. I

have said "good-bye" to the office. I have arranged everything about beginning to-morrow. I am a free man, Margaret, and I never was free before—if you knew what I feel!

Margaret, though she smiled, looked at him with a somewhat woe-begone expression. If he had found his freedom, as he so rejoicingly said, she had lost hers, and the realization was not without its sting.

'Listen to me,' he said. 'I have all the day before me, but after this day I dare say we shall seldom see each other. I shall not do anything underhand; I shall not try to see you against your father's orders, which he will no doubt promulgate as soon as he comes home to-night. But he has not promulgated them yet, and I want you to give me this one afternoon. Come out with me. I will call and fetch you, and let us go off somewhere where it is quiet and free, and

there are trees and fields and the country. We shall have it to remember always afterwards. I will bring you home again, at whatever time you like. Don't say me nay, Margaret.'

Margaret had no intention of saying him nay. The project had its attractions for her also. She consented.

'That is right,' said Hugh, when she had promised. 'We will do the regular Darkingford excursionist, and go to Thellamere, because it is an excursionist place; and as this is not one of the stock days for it, it will be as quiet as it can be. When one is in a state of transition from one kind of hard labour to another, one may allow one's self an afternoon's holiday without being accused of idleness.'

Margaret felt like one in a dream. It was something so strange and so utterly unheard of for her; it was a glimpse into such a

wonderful unknown life, that she could not take in the meaning of it at all.

But she promised to be ready for him at a certain hour, and she kept her word. He came for her, and they took the train to a well-known spot, some half an hour's journey from Darkingford—a spot where there were green woods and spring flowers, and a pure, clear atmosphere, and exquisite distances to be seen from the woods which crowned the hill. In such a wood—a pine-wood—they spent the long, delicious afternoon; she sitting with her back against the red-brown trunk of one of the fir-trees, and he lying on the ground at her knee; and they talked about the future, and planned out what they would do when things grew brighter, and years had rolled by. And then there ensued long silences; and Margaret, in one of these silences, lifted her head, and raised her eyes, and gazed forth through the straight stems of the pines,

to where in the distance there was a line of light shimmering beyond those stems, which one might have imagined to be the sea—that sea which would presently roll between her and him. All her past life—all the present—Darkingford, with its streets, its men and its noises, faded softly away into the far distance, and became silent in her mind; while that line of light that was the sea, seemed to stretch and expand, and a breeze that rustled through the trees, and waved their tops, was the surge breaking on a shore on which she stood alone—utterly alone. Forgetting all and everything except the feeling of extreme desolation which she had, Margaret bowed her head, and began to weep. Hot tears rained from her eyes, and solaced her soul; and in the midst of her weeping, she felt her hand taken, and her lover's lips pressed upon it, passionately, earnestly, again and again.

‘Weep, Margaret, if you will,’ said his

voice. 'I would not deny you even tears, if they consoled you; but tell me you do not weep from regret at what you have done this day.'

It seemed to Margaret that now, and never before, she understood what union of heart and soul might mean. She dried her tears, pressed her lips upon his forehead, and said steadily :

'I did—I did regret it; but I do not now. Those tears have wiped all my doubts and fears away, and I am glad, heart and soul.'

They lingered yet an hour or so in the wood, and amongst the scented lanes, and then it was time to go to the station—time for life and labour to begin again.

'When you wish to see me,' he said, 'if you should be going alone to some meeting, or to any lecture on Sunday, or at any other time when there is a chance or an opportunity, let me know, and I shall be at your service.'

And,' he added, with a smile, 'if I may not come into your house and see you, and talk to you as I used to do, that does not matter so much now, now that I know what I do know. No one can forbid me to walk past your window on my way home from work. Look out for a white jacket, Margaret, and a bag of tools, about six o'clock in the evening.'

Margaret smiled—rather sadly. It was like a dream, or as if she were being forced to act a part in a play, for which part she could not feel much enthusiasm ; but, knowing how real it all was to him, she did not by look or word disturb his pleasure—for pleasure it evidently was that he felt in this new *rôle*.

'When I do see you going past in that way,' she said tenderly, 'you may be sure that I shall be prouder of you than if you drove past in a coach and pair.'

They separated at the door of her father's house, Nowell quite light-hearted, and

exultant in his new freedom, and what he chose to consider his prospects. She was low and sad, expecting that on her father's return there would be strife and hard words ; and as to Nowell's prospects, though she had yielded to him in his wish, she would have been tempted to agree with Paul Lawford, who had told Nowell the night before, that the reason why his prospects were so wide was because there was nothing in the landscape of the future—the horizon was empty, and the plain boundless.

The interview between Margaret and her father was not by any means vehement ; it left her almost more unhappy than she had been before. He came in, looking, to her surprise, quite brisk and light-hearted, and she heard him whistling a little to himself as he hung up his hat, and took off the handkerchief he wore round his throat in the east winds. Then he came into her sitting-room, as was

his wont, and it was the sight of her face that first seemed to remind him of what had happened.

‘Ha!’ he observed, sticking his hands into his pockets; and then coldly, ‘Margery, my girl, you told me there was no perversity in your conduct. If that is the case, explain to me what you mean by obstinately refusing to hear of a certain young man for a husband, when I particularly desired that you should marry him; and then, as soon as he is without a penny, and I feel it most undesirable that you should have anything to do with him, turning round and getting engaged to him? If that isn’t perversity, what is?’

‘I suppose it looks so to you,’ she said. ‘I can only say you are mistaken. And, father, I might ask you what is perversity if you have not shown it, in first insisting that I should marry a certain young man whether I liked him or not; and then, when perhaps

I might have begun to accommodate myself to your wish, turning round and saying that I must have nothing more to do with him ? Your argument cuts both ways.'

'I'm no logician, but I do know my own mind ; which you, my girl, in common with many other women, seem not to do. But hearken to me ! I have not given myself much trouble about this affair, as the youngster tells me he is going to emigrate, and that he means to come back and fetch you when he is in a proper position to do so. I have got quite other views for you, and I will not have him here ; do you understand ?'

'Yes ; quite. He has been to see me to-day, and we have been out together this afternoon. He knew you would say that.'

'I do say it. Don't let me hear any more about it. You may marry, or you may not ;

but circumstances have placed you far out of his reach, and I am quite determined on that point.'

She made no answer.

Mr. Hankinson forbore to put a veto on correspondence, perhaps because he had a secret inkling that it would have been useless for him to do so ; but he had felt a load taken off his mind when Nowell told him he was going abroad, and he did not for a moment believe in the continuance of such an engagement. One or the other of them would fail in faith. He had no belief in the rapid accumulation of fortunes by young men who went out to Australia as journeymen carpenters ; and now that Mr. Nowell's vast business was left entirely in his management, he looked forward with glowing feelings to the future. He was going to make a great fortune, and Margaret would be an heiress as well as Peril Nowell ; and nonsense,

such as the idea of marrying that boy, would presently fade out of her mind.

So weeks went by—the weeks that made May and June—and Margaret and Hugh scarcely ever met to have a conversation or a handclasp. But they exchanged letters, long and numerous ; and he, as he had promised, used to pass her window every evening as he went home from his work. He took a pride in donning a particularly workmanlike garb, and in slinging his bag of tools over his shoulder in no uncertain manner. He met many an old acquaintance, who stared at him in astonishment, uncertain whether he were in earnest, or engaged in carrying out some elaborate joke. He and Lawford laughed mightily over one adventure in particular : when, walking side by side towards their lodgings, they met face to face the bride whom Lawford had described to his sister, and whom Nowell had, one evening long ago,

handed down to dinner. She recognised them both, and she too gave a stare of amazement, which changed into a red flush of indignation when the *soi-disant* carpenter, with an amiable smile, pulled off his cap, and politely wished her good-evening. His companion did the same. In her surprise she began a bow, strangled it ere it was finished, tossed her head, and walked onwards, while the two culprits only waited till she was fairly out of hearing to burst into a shout of laughter. This was one of the bright and amusing episodes. There were plenty of darker hours, fears, and withdrawals of light and life ; but on the whole, as the summer progressed, Nowell's purpose strengthened, and his confidence increased.



CHAPTER VI.

A DISCOURSE ON CHIFFONS.

‘**P**ERIL, my dear, I want to talk to you. Come and sit down beside me.’

It was Mrs. Trelawney who spoke, and the place was the Rectory garden, on a hot and perfect June afternoon. Mrs. Trelawney, wrapped in a fleecy shawl, was lying on a large couch, which had been carried for her to a sheltered corner ; there was a rug on the grass, and one or two straw or American hammock or lounging chairs, but no other persons save the lady and her young visitor. This Rectory garden was a very beautiful

place, such a spot as Mr. Trelawney, if he had had his heart's desire, and been the clergyman of some great city parish, swarming with life, would have yearned for—probably in vain.

The house was built in a little hollow, and looked south-west ; the hill under which it nestled sheltered it from northern and eastern blasts. The grounds were of fair dimensions : they extended over the little hill behind the house, from which there was a grand view of the rolling ocean. They were laid out in pleasant lawns and shrubberies and terraces ; from one of the latter one could see far and wide over the waters and along the coast. It had a peculiar fascination for Peril. There were no large trees in this garden ; such of them as grew there were bent westwards, and all their boughs driven that way by the strong salt sea breezes, which would tolerate no opposition to their course.

The trees, then, stretched their arms beseechingly westwards ; but certain kinds of flowers and blossoming shrubs flourished well here, and there were rockeries with rock-plants and some ferns. Very likely the owner of some rich south-country garden, with clumps of noble trees and luxuriant vegetation, might have looked down with contempt upon this spot, reclaimed as it were from the cliff ; but to those who owned it, and to Peril, it was full of delights. Many an hour since her advent in Wiswell had she paced that gravelled terrace, and studied the forms of the waves, and the sweeping changes of tint in lights and shadows, caused by the clouds moving above the surface of that great looking-glass, the German Ocean. At one side of the garden a smooth lawn was laid out, with a tennis-net stretched across it, and balls and rackets reposed on the grass.

‘ Come here, child ! ’ repeated the lady, as

Peril did not at first reply. 'I want to speak to you about something.'

Peril, who had been gazing across the sea with her hand arched over her eyes, turned at this second summons. Mrs. Trelawney watched her movements with a sort of pleased interest and curiosity—a studious intentness which she felt still, for the girl's actions and movements were as strange and surprising to her as they were beautiful. She had had a new and strong interest in life opened up to her ever since the afternoon when her husband, leading Peril up to her sofa, had said, 'My dear, this is Miss Nowell. I have brought her to see you.' Peril was to her a living study, a moving romance. She never wearied of the study: the romance, though there was so far so little action or apparent mystery in it, interested her more than a cart-load of the novels which came to her in her Mudie-box from town.

She watched now, with unabated freshness of interest, the tall and beautiful form in its long black gown, the wonderfully beautiful face in its frame of a broad black hat with a large plume. A thick knot of twisted wavy hair rolled from under this hat, and delicate little rings and tendrils of the same clustered about the temples and the small, shell-like ears. No more fastidious woman than Maud Trelawney ever lived; but in the beauty of Peril Nowell she found more than mere satisfaction—delight and contentment, and a fulness of pleasure such as she had not experienced for years. She had grown to look upon her with jealous fondness, as a thing peculiarly her own. She had exerted upon Peril all her powers of fascination, and they were many; and she had thoroughly succeeded in her object of making the girl devoted to her. She even went so far as to own quite frankly to herself, though she would

not have done so to anyone else, that she was glad Peril had so few friends, no relations to speak of, and that she was so lonely, so reserved, and so chary of making new acquaintances. It bound her the faster to them, with whom she seemed to feel a kind of natural affinity. Her beautiful face bent now over Mrs. Trelawney with a musing, serious expression, as if she had not quite brought her mind down from the distant point on which it had been fixed.

‘What is it you want, dear?’ she asked.

‘Only to say a few words to you about something. You must not think me meddlesome, you know. Oh, how tiresome! Here is Stephen Harkland; my little lecture will have to stand over till he has gone.’

A youth was advancing to them over the slope, who, perceiving that they saw him, pulled off his cap, and smiled, and hastened his steps. He was a tall, slim young fellow,

graceful, but not too robust in build ; he had a handsome face, but one whose contagious brightness of look and irresistible smile constituted its charm more than any beauty of form or feature. He was very young, evidently, looking barely one or two and twenty ; and the nature of his errand was indicated by his costume of flannels, dark-blue jacket, and the tennis-bat which he carried in his hand.

‘ Good-afternoon, Stephen,’ observed Mrs. Trelawney, rather drily. ‘ What an insatiable tennis-player you are ! You were here on Saturday—to-day is Monday. I suppose you got some one to bind you with a strong cord, or an iron chain, to a post yesterday, or you would have been irresistibly propelled hither on Sunday too ?’

‘ There is absolutely nothing else to do, Mrs. Trelawney,’ he said, with the same infectious smile ; ‘ and besides, I like it.

And moreover, you told me yourself'—he was looking at Peril all the time he was talking, while she gravely shook hands with him—'that you wanted Miss Nowell to be perfect in the game by the middle of July, by the time you begin to give your parties. Now I submit——'

'That with such a slow pupil it will take every bit of your time every afternoon to produce the desired result,' observed Mrs. Trelawney calmly, 'even with your brilliant powers as an instructor.'

'Don't you wonder how I endure the treatment to which she subjects me?' said young Harkland, laughing, to Peril.

'You seem to come again and again to get more of it,' she replied gravely.

'Well, do you feel disposed to play with him, Peril?' said the elder lady; 'because, pray don't, unless you really wish it.'

'But I do; and I warn Mr. Harkland to

take care what he is doing, for I mean to beat him,' said she, rising from the low chair on which she had sat, and moving towards the rackets which lay on the grass.

'What do your friends say about your deserting them in this way, Ste?' asked Mrs. Trelawney in a low voice of the young man, who had remained beside her.

'I don't know,' he said, with bright indifference; 'and I really don't care, so long as you let me come here, Mrs. Trelawney.'

'You are welcome to come, so long as you behave as I told you to,' she said, with an indulgent smile. 'It isn't every man that I could trust as I do you. You see, she makes no other friends, and I feel a sort of responsibility for her. I think I am gradually weaning her away from her morbid thoughts about that cousin: you know I told you about him.'

'I know—be hanged to him!' observed

Stephen Harkland, his ear attentive to his monitress, his eye fixed upon Peril.

‘There, go!’ said Mrs. Trelawney; ‘she’s waiting for you. But, Ste, one word—I hope you don’t say too much about her to everybody.’

‘Mrs. Trelawney, I gave you my promise,’ he said, rather reproachfully.

She nodded, and he immediately darted off to the other side of the net, and called to Peril to begin.

Mrs. Trelawney, lying on her couch, watched them, and her grievances were soothed, and her heart grew light, and her brain was very busy. The mother of Stephen Harkland had been her school-fellow and her friend when she was a girl. Agnes Fairfax had married a rich country gentleman—Stephen Harkland, of Broadlands; Maud Askwith had become Maud Trelawney. But the rich woman had died early, leaving only

this boy behind her. Maud Trelawney, childless and an invalid, a disappointed woman who would rather have died than said she was disappointed, though she allowed her looks, and actions, and life, to say so plainly enough—this disappointed woman had always made Stephen her *protégé*, and he had repaid her kindness with great regard. But she could not have him always with her: he was at school, at college, travelling abroad, spending whole seasons in London, qualifying himself to be a man of the world, which, indeed, was what she most desired him to become. She had the highest respect for such a career. She was ambitious for him; she watched every step of his progress eagerly and with jealous eyes. He was at home now, having left Oxford, and there was talk about his going to travel soon; but in the meantime he was here, and ever since the afternoon, now about a month ago, when he had come and found

Peril with her, Mrs. Trelawney's heart and mind and soul had been filled with a project which she cherished more and more fondly as days went by.

Why should not Stephen marry Peril? She was very young: he could well afford to wait the six years which must elapse before she could marry without forfeiting the greater part of her inheritance. Mrs. Trelawney was acquainted with all the conditions of that inheritance, partly from Mr. Wistar's communications to her husband, partly from what Peril had herself revealed in different conversations. Stephen could stand the test of that waiting—at least she thought so. In his refined and sunny nature there were no vices; he had no debts, no dark spots of any kind in his career. He was a true heart, and neither weak nor effeminate, with all his boyishness. The more she thought of the scheme the more delightful did it seem in Mrs. Trelaw-

ney's eyes. The six years' probation, considered in the abstract, was a recommendation to her rather than a drawback. During that time she would be able to attach Peril to herself, as a daughter to her mother ; she would bind her fast to her by every tie of affection. And, moreover, she would so form her mind and manners, which, the lady flattered herself, offered the finest natural material for her manipulation, that when she became Stephen Harkland's wife, and one of the leading women in the Riding, she should be in no way disqualified for, or unequal to, the position. It was a task which offered irresistible attractions to Mrs. Trelawney's turn of mind. The very prospect of it gave a zest to her life such as she had not felt for years.

So far, everything promised admirably for the furtherance of her design. Stephen, though he did not say much about it, was evidently extremely fascinated with the strange

and beautiful creature who had appeared amongst them. Peril—Mrs. Trelawney had been astonished at the change which had come over Peril ; at her improved cheerfulness, her greater love of life ; the gradual disappearance of her listlessness and weariness. She was intensely reserved, but she did not disguise the pleasure she found in young Harkland's society. She could laugh now, and bandy jests with him, and scoff at his dandy ways sometimes.

What a graceful, beautiful pair of creatures they were ! thought the invalid, as she watched the two figures in ever-varying attitudes of quickness, strength, speed, adroitness ; and the faces, now upturned, now glancing at one another, always animated and eager. There ! something has amused Peril ; her usual immovable gravity relaxes, and a smile, startling in its sweetness and beauty, flashes like a sun-beam over her tragic face, and is gone. No

wonder that Stephen, as he stoops for the ball, cannot help looking up at her, and in gazing at her, gropes in vain for what he wants. The spectacle makes her laugh again ; she stoops over the net, and spoons up the ball with her racket.

‘ When you are seeking a small thing it is as well to look on the ground for it, and not into the sky as if you were star-gazing,’ she says, a little sarcastically.

‘ Star-gazing ; so I was,’ he answers promptly. ‘ I was looking into your eyes, Miss Nowell.’

‘ Oh, pooh ! We will keep to the game, if you please ; and as I want to know how to play, I shall be glad if you will attend to the balls, and tell me when I am wrong.’

‘ Thy servant hears and obeys,’ he said, returning to his place and beginning to serve.

Mrs. Trelawney smiled. It was just what

she wished. She would not have Peril too much pleased, but she was glad that she was pleased ; and could anything well be more beautiful than she looked now, with the slight flush of colour on her pale cheeks, and the light in her eyes, and, reflected Mrs. Trelawney with infinite satisfaction, not a trace of the romp or the hoyden in any of her movements ? So many girls who are even more than passable when they are in repose or quiet movement, make a fatal exhibition and destroy all illusion as soon as they begin to run or jump in tennis, or any other active game.

‘ If one could imagine a young Diana condescending to a frivolous sport like that,’ thought Mrs. Trelawney, ‘ I should say that she might stand for the model.’

The game was continued merrily and gracefully. The air was like balm ; the slight breeze was both soft and bracing, coming

from a blue and halcyon summer sea ; and the two figures on the tennis-court stood out, sharp and clear, against the pure light. Could this graceful bounding girl, with the frequent smile and the bright and animated look, possibly be the moody and unhappy Peril Nowell, whose furies had been like madness, who in one wild burst of passion had so wronged another that his prospects were ruined, and his whole life and career had to be shaped anew ? Was this really she who had suffered till she could suffer no longer, and so had fainted away under the opprobrium brought by her own deed upon herself ? and, last of all, was it possible that she was so fickle, so careless, and so reckless as to forget, in these brighter moments, all the darkness that had gone before ? Was it the case that having got her spoils, she was now bent upon enjoying them and the pleasures they could bring her ; indemnifying herself for the

sorrows she had endured, and letting all that old weary past die out ?

A waiting-maid of Mrs. Trelawney's made her appearance with a tray of tea, which she set upon the gipsy-table. The lady called to Peril to come and pour it out.

'Come, Stephen, you must both want some refreshment after your frantic exertions. Come and have some tea.'

'Thanks, I will—just one cup ; and then I must go. I'm awfully sorry—*awfully*'—with intense earnestness, as if there could be the shadow of a doubt upon the subject ; 'but I promised my father to be back by six o'clock. He's got a party of people coming to dinner—family friends, old ones, or something equally trying—and I promised to stand by him. I'd far rather stop here, I assure you.'

'We will accept your asseverations,' said Mrs. Trelawney. 'And as I want to have a little talk with Miss Nowell, perhaps——'

‘ I see. I had better make myself scarce. Then, to-morrow afternoon—oh no ! what a nuisance ! To-morrow I have to ride with the Bayliffes. Oh, how I wish you rode, Miss Nowell !’

‘ How do you know that I don’t ?’ asked Peril.

‘ Do you—do you really ?’

‘ Of course I do. I did, at least. I have never been on horseback since—since I was a—child.’

‘ You do ? oh, then, won’t you——’

‘ Nonsense, Stephen ! You forget that Miss Nowell is not going out at all, at present. Be grateful for the privileges you have, and not too greedy for more.’

‘ That’s true. I accept the rebuke,’ he said, laughing, and wished them good-afternoon, and went off at a sort of run, for all that he did was quick, light, and mercurial.

‘ How can he run ?’ observed Peril, looking

after him with a kind of wonder. 'What a strange creature he is, Mrs. Trelawney! Do you think he was ever unhappy in his life?'

'No; not really unhappy. But that is a good deal owing to his bright and sunny temperament. He is light-hearted, and it costs him no effort to be generous and kind. That is a sort of character that must be happy.'

'Yes,' said Peril, and a profound sigh followed her words.

'He reminds me of some kinds of girls whom I used to see,' she went on, musingly. 'There were one or two at the convent. Everyone loved them; a look of theirs always seemed to make everything right. They could always say the right thing, and no one was ever angry with them. What a wonderful thing it must be to have the power of making people love you like that! Do they

know how charming they are? Are they conscious of it, I wonder?’

‘I am sure Stephen is not. He often says how very kind people are to him. He is quite unaware how attractive he is to others.’

‘Yes; he is so very nice.’

‘He is. I am very fond and proud of him. Now, my dear, to our interrupted conversation. If we are not quick, we shall be having my husband back again. I want to speak to you about your dress.’

‘About my dress—yes?’

‘I observe that you still wear the deepest black. Do you think it is necessary? Mind I don’t want you to make any difference that you do not approve of, but since it was your grandfather, and not a father, or mother, or brother for whom you are in mourning——’

Peril started, and looked at Mrs. Trelawney with wide, eager eyes.

‘Now that you speak of it, I remember for

the first time that I am dressed in mourning,' said she. 'And I suppose everyone will imagine that it is for my grandfather, will they not?'

'And if they do, my dear, will it not be true?'

'No!' she exclaimed indignantly. 'I remember, now, on the day of the funeral they brought me this gown that I have on, and told me to put it on. I did so. I never thought anything about it. It was black, like my feelings, and I put it on. But if they think it is a sign of mourning—of mourning for *him*—there never was a greater mistake. I ought rather to dress myself in the gayest colours and the brightest ribands I possess, to show what I feel about *that*.'

'Hush, my dear child! hush!'

'I will hush if you tell me, Mrs. Trelawney, but it leaves my feelings just the same. I do not mourn for him one bit, I mourn the

wrong I have done, and the wretchedness I have caused. So, after all, my black dress is the best. I had better keep to it.'

'Literally, your black *dress*,' observed Mrs. Trelawney playfully. 'I want to persuade you, whether your wardrobe be black or white, to replenish it.'

'Why, is this not suitable?' asked Peril, looking down at the dull folds of 'paramatta,' and the heavy crape trimmings of her sable garment.

'It has been a very handsome dress, but you must remember that you have worn it for two or three months every day, and all day, for walking and scrambling and running about in, and playing tennis, and everything else. I want you to have some white summer gowns, and some garden-hats, and several other things. In short, my dear, I want you to dress yourself a little more in accordance with your position and even your present in-

come, never to mention what you must do afterwards.'

'Income — position !' repeated Peril.

'What is my position, I wonder ?'

Mrs. Trelawney felt that she must not allow herself to show any embarrassment. She was determined to carry her point, but she did not want Peril to enter into a discussion as to the rights and wrongs of her inheritance ; she considered her views there-upon to be morbid. She therefore glided adroitly out of the difficulty by saying :

'I mean, my dear, that whatever is decided about your future proceedings, there is no need, and no ground at all for you to neglect yourself or appear as anything but a lady. May I say just what I mean ?'

'Please do, Mrs. Trelawney. I know nothing about these things.'

'Well, then, my child, I mean that you must not go about any longer in this summer

weather in that solitary, heavy, long-tailed garment, which is more like a widow's robe than anything else. You had great difficulty in playing tennis, I observed, though you kilted the thing very cleverly over your arm. But it offends my eye, and my sense of propriety, and if anyone but you wore it, my pet, she would look simply *hideous*. You must not presume upon your own great beauty, Peril,' concluded Mrs. Trelawney, a mixture of flattery and command in her caressing tones.

'I won't indeed, dear Mrs. Trelawney,' was the *naïve* reply. 'Do tell me what it is you would like me to do.'

'I am going to write to my dressmaker at York, to send one of her people over for my orders. When she comes, she could bring some things on approval for you, such as I will tell her of; and to please me, and because I assure you that you ought to do so, you will

let me choose two or three dresses for you, eh ?

‘As many as you like,’ said Peril. ‘I am afraid I had never thought anything about it. Since you are so good as to let me come here, I should like to please you in my dress as well as in other things. But,’ she added, as if a sudden thought had struck her, ‘you will let them all be very plain and simple, and as few as possible, will you not ?’

‘Certainly, that would be my own idea,’ said Mrs. Trelawney graciously, and delighted at having gained her end. ‘You are one of the very few people who can stand a severely simple style of dress. But,’ she added half musingly, ‘why are you so anxious to be economical in such things ?’

‘I mean to economize in everything, until I see justice done,’ said Peril curtly and decisively, thus giving Mrs. Trelawney a

disagreeable reminder that her mind harped yet upon that string to whose note the elder lady had so strong an objection.

‘My dear child, I hardly see the use of that. Even if justice were done, as you say, you would still be a rich woman—you would have a handsome fortune, and it would be necessary for you to dress well and appropriately. There is nothing so fatal as to get into a cramped, pinched way of doing things while you are young, unless there is absolute need for it ; and then, of course, it is a misfortune, but it cannot be avoided. But if it is not necessary, it gives a sort of *bourgeoise* stamp, which is never eradicated afterwards ; and I don’t want you to be *bourgeoise*, but a woman of the world, fit to take rank anywhere.’

Peril looked gratefully up at her.

‘If you could make me anything in the world like yourself, at the distance of about

a thousand miles behind the original, how proud I should be!' she said. 'But I will explain to you why I want to economize. It is not for the sake of saving money—very far from it—I never cared anything or understood anything about money. But it is because Hugh is very poor, though I am rich. He is forced to be economical, I know. He will have to pinch and scrape—he has a hundred a year left to him ; I suppose until I am my own mistress it will be impossible for me to live on a hundred a year, or I would not spend a penny more. But I am firmly resolved to have no luxuries and no indulgences, except what I am obliged to take. If he is poor, I will be poor too, until I find out some way of restoring his money to him ; for it is his, not mine. That is all. I shall do what you think best about the dresses, because I am sure you must know all about it ; but if they are pretty, I shall feel every

time that I put one of them on, that I ought to apologize and explain to him.'

Mrs. Trelawney's secret feeling was one of real vexation and irritation. She felt a strong resentment against this Hugh Nowell, with his stupid wrongs, and she foresaw that unless Peril's views changed he would prove a very formidable obstacle to the carrying out of the plans which she had formed with regard to the girl's future. Still, it was really only a month or two since she had become acquainted with Peril, and wonderful progress had been made even in that time. With kindness, firmness, persistency, and a reasonable length of time in which to wield over Peril an undivided influence, she might hope to compass almost everything she desired. She knew better than to oppose what Peril said ; she was aware that would but strengthen her resolution. She restrained her vexation, and passed her steady, thin white hand across

the waving, dusky locks which crowned the beautiful head, and seemed to weigh almost too heavily upon the delicate nape.

‘You are a very tender-hearted, scrupulous child,’ she said. ‘Be sure that I shall respect your wishes, and not lead you into any extravagance. You please me exceedingly by yielding to me thus, and I assure you, on the word of an old woman who has seen a good deal of the world in her day, that you do wisely to trust to me.’

‘I do so entirely,’ said Peril, drawing the hand down and carrying it to her lips.

‘Mutual admiration cult in full exercise!’ observed a voice behind them, and a shadow was cast across the tea-table. They turned; it was Mr. Trelawney, who had come up the garden from the east, by a path which led from the cliffs through a lane and a private road, to his house. He looked tired, as he

often was, with his long walks over the cliffs or inland.

‘I will give you some tea,’ said Peril, pushing one of the low chairs invitingly towards him.

She had never yet quite got over the first feelings she had had about Mr. Trelawney—that he had appeared unto her as a kind of divine messenger, or at least an elevated and exalted being, to whom she had on a first impulse spoken out the woe of her heart, and who had answered, not her unconventional speech in worldly-wise words of caution and reserve, but who had replied to her spiritual need with a voice of understanding, and who could therefore never be to her exactly as other men.

The shadows were deepening, and a cooler, sharper breath had stolen into the evening air ; fresh it came, and bracing from the waste of emerald waters below them. The evening

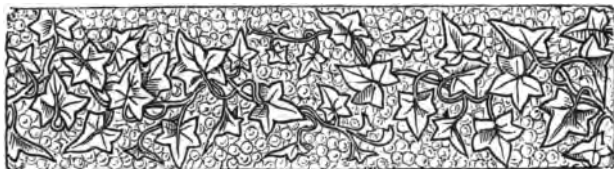
sky was exquisite in its pallid yellow-green ; the west was hidden from them by the little hill. They sat in silence for a time, till at last Mr. Trelawney said to his wife that she must stay out no longer, and Peril, stretching out her hand for the broad hat she had laid aside, said she must go too—her uncle would have come in, and would be looking for her. She kissed Mrs. Trelawney, who pressed her hand, and whispered again that she was pleased with her, and the clergyman walked with her to the gate.

‘You say your uncle will be looking for you,’ he observed, regarding her with his penetrating smile. ‘Is there nothing in that—no good ? No wholesomeness and healing ?’

‘There is a whole world of good in it, Mr. Trelawney. No one ever looked out for me, or waited for my coming before ; and I feel as if nothing I could do for him could express my gratitude for that expectancy of his.’

‘That is well,’ he said, and smiled again at the eager comprehensive impetuosity of her sentiment. ‘I have something for you here,’ he added, pulling a folded paper from his pocket: ‘some lines of poetry that I read in a review the other day. I copied them, for they pleased me with their wild and musical ring, and they have got a truth in them which you might fail to find in a whole system of philosophy; but the name of their writer, and of the book into which he has put them, I have forgotten. Read them at your leisure, and the next time we meet tell me what you think of them.’

Peril thanked him as she took the paper and put it into her pocket; wished him good-night with a smile and a wave of the hand, and then stepped quickly down the pleasant lane towards Stanesacre.



CHAPTER VII.

MRS. TRELAWNEY'S RIVALS.

CALLING at the Rectory on the following afternoon, to know if she could read to Mrs. Trelawney, or do anything to amuse her, Peril was told that the lady was ill with one of her severe headaches, when she could see no one, and do nothing but lie still and wait until it was over. Leaving a message of regret, Peril said she would go through the garden to the cliff, which she often did, and by this means secured perfect privacy and retirement. Often she sat for many hours in one of the little hollows, sunny and warm, and clothed with

the sweet, short, and wiry cliff grass ; and from this vantage-ground she could look upon the sea, and view the ships that sailed upon it, the birds that wheeled above it or skimmed the wave, and the clouds that swept across the heavens from end to end.

To this spot she now betook herself, and found stillness and repose : a lulling murmur of quiet waves far below, and the ecstatic song of a lark high above—such a treble and such a bass as no orchestra in any concert-room ever produced, played they never so cunningly their different instruments.

As usual, no sooner was she alone than her thoughts went back to Darkingford, but they did not dwell there so long this time. Mr. Hankinson had very faithfully carried out Peril's behest, to tell her no news ; to confine his communications to purely business matters. This he had done. He had been as brief and as business-like as possible ; he had told her

nothing. She did not know of Hugh's having left the works, or of the resolution which he was even now putting into practice. When she thought of him she imagined him pinched in means, and badly off, sharing Lawford's lodgings, and going backwards and forwards, to and from his toil at the desk, in the place where he ought to have been ruling as master. It was a sufficiently disagreeable thought for her, but of the actual truth she was quite ignorant. Mrs. Trelawney's talk yesterday had made some impression upon her, as it was natural it should. Nor had Stephen Harkland's attentive eyes, and his boyishly open, yet chivalrous admiration of her, been quite without their effect ; and her uncle's bluff, yet open-hearted kindness and affection was a source of deep pleasure to her ; it stirred her heart very strongly. She had—it was inevitable that she should—begun to tell herself that she could not be so utterly

bad and vile—so entirely selfish and abominable, since all these people were so kind to her, and seemed fond of her. Why should they trouble themselves to pretend and assume a feeling they did not experience? She had eyes, and an intelligence; she could see that Mr. and Mrs. Trelawney were persons of cultivation and natural capacities far beyond what had distinguished anyone she had ever seen at her grandfather's house; they belonged also to those 'Tories,' those 'bloated aristocrats,' against whom she had heard Hugh Nowell launch forth now and then in no measured terms. Stephen Harkland, she supposed, was another; a young landowner, who would one day have tenants and horses and hounds, and be one of the privileged classes, and—very nice he was, said Peril to herself. Her uncle Wistar, too, was a staunch old Tory as ever lived: inclined to believe that the spread of education by board-

schools was pernicious—that it would raise the labouring man out of his proper sphere, and exterminate ploughboys and maid-servants such as used to people the rural earth in better days. He firmly believed in these and many other superstitions, and he was a kind and gentle and generous old soul at bottom; one who had never in his life wronged any man of a penny, and who had even forgiven his bailiff for voting Liberal at the last general election. They were one and all, to go back to the original argument, people utterly different from those amongst whom her lot in England had hitherto been cast—her convent experience in Rio does not count—and they belonged to classes either hated, despised, or envied by those she had known in Darkingford.

All Peril knew was, that whether they were bloated aristocrats or not—whether they held pernicious political and social opinions

or not—whether they believed wholly in a stirring foreign policy, to the detriment of home and commercial interests or not, they had one and all been very kind to her, had admitted and welcomed her within their circle, had cheered her sorrow, had, by a thousand delicate little arts and graces and beguilements, charmed her out of her misery, her darkness, and her depression, till now she felt that life did really contain something that was worth thinking about ; and she loved these people, one and all of them, with a hot eagerness and a very great love. All the warmth and fire of her hitherto repressed affections seemed to rush out towards them. They were kind to her ; they treated her as if she were worth considering and thinking about ; they seemed to think less of money and more of living than those other people—than even Hugh had done, though he had always hated his drudgery, and aimed at

something better. She meditated upon their goodness, and loved them for it ; and with characteristic impulsiveness began to wonder in what way she could possibly display her gratitude to them. It was a fact that, despite her solemn protestation to Mrs. Trelawney yesterday, the image of Hugh Nowell was fainter in her heart than it had been. She had a less intensely keen consciousness of her own guilt and wickedness, and a more vivid conviction that he, in refusing her overtures, and driving her away with a ban upon her, had not behaved so generously as he might have done. She was still, above everything, desirous to restore to him his own ; but mingled with this desire a feeling of great impatience was beginning to make itself felt —impatience that he did not make it easier to her to effect this restoration.

She pondered upon these things this afternoon, sitting alone, and recalled some words

of her uncle's spoken that very day to her, in answer to a timid suggestion of hers, that they had never yet arranged on what terms she was to live with him.

‘Eh, lass, ne’er think o’ that !’ he had said. ‘What difference makes the bedroom and the bit o’ victuals and drink that does for you ? Your company pays me for that ; and if you would only grow a bit more blithesome, ’twould do more—’twould give interest. When you want to keep a trap and a pony, or the like, at your own charges be it, since I’m not rich enough to afford more than I’ve got ; but, for the rest, for pity’s sake say nought more about it.’

Her eyes grew moist and dim as she recalled this hearty kind of treatment, and she felt for her pocket-handkerchief to wipe the tears away ; in doing so her hand encountered the piece of paper which Mr. Trelawney had given her at parting yesterday. She had

forgotten it. Drawing it forth now, she found on it a copy of verses in his hand, and she read them in the sunshine to the song of the lark, and the boom of the waves; and her bosom swelled, and her throat, as she took them into her heart.

‘ Dear blossoms, roses red,
That once about my head
Waved with a flood of soft-caressing splendour,
I bid you all farewell ;
Yes, to each flower that fell
Upon youth’s brows from heaven with flower-touch tender.
A long good-bye to all—
White roses, lilies tall ;
I would not fail to all sweet final thanks to render.

‘ O ferns and meadowsweet,
O rivulets that beat
With silvery footing once amid the grasses,
A long, long, long good-bye !
O many a sunset sky
Of giant purple clouds in heaped-up masses ;
O seas that climbed and surged,
By wintry storm-blasts urged,
Farewell, ere from you all my mortal vision passes.

‘ Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye,
Blue, perfect summer sky,
And all the dreams of youth and hope that wandered

Towards heaven on sun-bright wings ;
A new chant in me springs,
And gone are the old ecstasies I pondered.
Farewell, ye high designs ;
The wreath that manhood twines
Is better than the leaves youth wildly plucked and
squandered.*

Peril read these words many times, until the ring and the music of them, and the meaning of them, seemed to sink into her heart and over her spirit. *Patience!* That was undoubtedly what they said ; but, at the same time, they tore at her heart-strings in such a way as to overcome her—they addressed themselves to the feelings which were strong within her, feelings of regret and yearning. Had not she said good-bye to all those things of which the poet took so wild a farewell ? He, because he had left boyhood for manhood, and grieved for the happy past,

* The writer read these lines in a review some time ago, and is unable to recall anything more particular concerning them.

while knowing that he entered upon something better ; she, because, though she was very young, had been so unhappy that she had never truly enjoyed those roses and lilies of life, nor known the passion of delight in the surging sea, nor danced beside the dancing brook in very lightness of heart. Mr. Trelawney had doubtless given her the verses for the sake of the encouragement at the end of them ; what she felt was the deep sorrow and yearning they conveyed for the youth and the life that could never come back. An unusual softness and tenderness of heart was upon her. She uttered a long, noiseless sigh ; and then, almost before she knew it, she found warm tears streaming from her eyes—tears which soothed and blessed her ; and, bowing her head upon her knee, she let these tears flow and flow as if they would never cease.

She knew not how long she had been

weeping ; she did know that, many a time, when her eyes had been dry, and every tear burnt up and consumed within her, she had been in hell, and that now she was not altogether unhappy, though she felt weak and worn, and as if she did not want to face existence, or do battle any longer with circumstances. She had forgotten where she was, and wept on.

‘Why are you crying? Have you hurt yourself?’ suddenly asked a clear child’s voice close beside her.

Startled, shocked, and almost alarmed, she looked up, and saw standing close to her a little boy, who looked about seven years old. He was a broad, and stalwart, and sturdy urchin, who planted himself well on his feet. He was dressed in a little suit of dark-blue, which set off admirably his fair clear skin, sunshiny hair, and blue eyes. He held by a string a dilapidated hobby-horse, which he

seemed to cherish with peculiar affection, though a formidable knotted whip in the other hand testified to a sense of the value of strict discipline. Both horse and whip were allowed a pause in their exertions while he gazed with great earnestness and attentiveness at Peril, and waited, evidently intending to have an answer to his question.

‘No, I have not hurt myself,’ said she, essaying a smile, and wondering all the time who or what it was he recalled to her mind. Where had she seen some one very like him? Those eyes looked at her in a way which startled her out of all her abstraction. Some other eyes must surely at some time have looked at her in that self-same way—so freely, openly, and candidly. The brow, the attitude of the little figure, the turn of the mouth, all were familiar to her, though she could have sworn that she had never seen the child before.

‘Then why do you cry?’ asked the little boy again, in a tone of real concern, as he came a step nearer and looked at her still more earnestly, and laid his hand upon her knee. ‘Has some one else hurt you?’ as a happy inspiration flashed upon his mind.

‘N—no; at least, not lately. I weep because I have been very sad, and most likely shall be so again—perhaps very soon. Do you never feel sad?’ she added, taking the little hand, which was not withdrawn, neither did any expression of distrust dawn in the large frank eyes.

‘No,’ said the child, shaking his head. ‘I don’t—never. I like you,’ he went on, with great gravity. ‘I think you are a pretty lady. I wish you wouldn’t cry. Do you live here?’

‘I live here now; yes. I have been here a good while, but I don’t think I have ever seen you before. What are you called?’

‘Humphrey Lawford.’

‘Humphrey—Lawford!’ she echoed slowly, and the mystery of the blue eyes and frank mouth solved itself, even as the little sedate voice spoke to her. ‘I know who you are, then. I know your papa.’

‘My papa doesn’t live here. My papa lives at Darkingford. It’s a long way off.’

‘Yes, I know. I used to live at Darkingford too; and, when I was there, I used to see your papa. He told me about you, and told me your name, and said he loved you very much. Now, then!’

Humphrey was exceedingly grave at first, and pondered, as children do ponder, over what seemed to him a very unlikely story. Then, though he did not say anything, he began to smile. It was a delightful smile, and it grew broader and broader, till at last he said:

‘Don’t you like papa very much?’

‘Yes, I do. He was very kind to me once, when nobody else was. It makes me glad to see his little boy in this way.’

This was putting things in a somewhat solemn light to Humphrey ; and Peril, wishing to distract attention from her tears, and not caring to enter into particulars about Humphrey’s papa and Darkingford, proceeded :

‘When did you come to Wiswell ?’

‘Yesterday ; with Aunt Katty.’

‘And how did you get here ?’

‘Up that lane, from the house,’ said Humphrey, pointing in the direction he meant.

Then Peril remembered that there was a road leading up here from the rather damp, deserted-looking old house called Wiswell Grange, which her uncle had told her belonged to the Lawfords.

‘I see,’ said Peril. ‘And you have

brought your horse with you. What is he called ?'

'Dobbin. He's three years old.'

'Indeed ! He looks as if he had been in the wars.'

'Well, he was a war-horse first,' said Humphrey gravely. 'Father said he was a war-horse when he gave him to me. He called him Buss—buss— No—Buceph——'

'Bucephalus ; was that his name ?'

'That was it,' said Humphrey, looking relieved. 'And when he was a war-horse, and had that name, he went into battle with other boys' horses, and that's how he lost his mane. And then, Aunt Katty said she couldn't do with a war-horse when father wasn't there to look after him, and he must be Dobbin, and draw a costermonger's cart ; so he does. I sell things, you know—watercress, and cockles.'

'To be sure. It was a sad fall, from

Bucephalus to Dobbin. Did you tell your father ?

‘ Yes ; I wrote him a letter. Aunt Katty guided my hand. Father said Aunt Katty would know best. I do wish father would come here. I want to see him so much.’

‘ Perhaps he will——’ Peril had just begun, when suddenly some one else rounded the hillock—a woman, this time, with chestnut hair and a pale face, comely but worn, and a shabby dress.

She was sufficiently like Paul for Peril at once to know who she must be, and she recognised his description of her in the grace with which she wore her old gown.

‘ Humphrey ! Oh, my goodness, child ! How you have frightened me ! I was convinced you had fallen over the cliffs into the sea. You shouldn’t, my love—you should not run away like this.’

Panting, she stopped, with a half-wondering

gaze at Peril—the gaze of all who saw her for the first time.

The latter smiled ; the little adventure had quite exhilarated her.

‘ He is quite safe, and has been talking to me,’ she said ; ‘ and——’

‘ Aunt Katty, the pretty lady knows father ; she says so.’

Humphrey displayed not the slightest penitence for having gone astray, but he was anxious to be the first to tell the news.

Mrs. Woodfall looked earnestly at Peril, drawing Humphrey to her the while.

‘ I am sure you are Mr. Lawford’s sister. My name is Peril Nowell. I knew your brother at Darkingford, and he used to talk to me about you.’

‘ You are Miss Nowell—I might have guessed that,’ said the other quickly. ‘ I have heard of you from Paul, of course.’

In her own mind she had rapidly decided ;

‘Well, no wonder that Paul raved about her. A less susceptible man might have done that.’

‘Oh, did he tell you about me? I am so glad I have met you. I have been here a great many weeks now, and I have had no news from ho—from Darkingford. Do you hear from Mr. Lawford?’

Mrs. Woodfall had seated herself in the hollow beside Peril; and while she talked to her, she ever and anon glanced at her, trying to read her—remembering the reading of her which Paul had given, and which she had not liked. She could, just yet, find nothing but a very beautiful young woman, with manners a little stately and dignified for one so young. But she was accustomed to place a great deal of reliance on Paul’s estimates of character, which, for all his seeming laziness and indifference to everyone and everything around him, were wont to be somewhat pene-

trating ; and she was not going to reject his verdict yet, till she knew rather more of the girl. She, as well as Humphrey, knew that Peril had been crying. She had not, like the boy, found her weeping, but she could see the traces of tears still wet on her cheek.

‘ I hear from him constantly,’ she said. ‘ It is our great trouble that, now he has at last got to England, we have to be apart. I heard from him yesterday, before we left London. It is his house we are staying at.’

‘ Yes. He told me about his house here. Did he—was he very well ?’ asked Peril, not willing to rush at the question she really wanted to ask.

‘ He did not say anything about himself, so I suppose he was.’

‘ Did he mention his friend Hugh Nowell ? Are they still living together, do you know ?’

‘ Yes ; they are,’ said Mrs. Woodfall com-

posedly. 'I suppose they will continue to do so till Mr. Nowell goes.'

'Goes!' echoed Peril, her face turning white. 'Goes where?'

'Surely you know that——'

'I know nothing. Pray, tell me!' she said, almost gaspingly. 'I have heard from no one but Mr. Hankinson, the manager of the property, and I told him to tell me nothing.'

'Mr. Hugh Nowell has adopted a somewhat original course of action, now that his fortunes are reduced. He has been taking lessons in joinering and carpentering, and in a short time he is going out to one of the Australian towns—I forget which—there intending to earn his living. When he considers himself well enough off, he is coming home to marry a lady called, so my brother tells——'

'Margaret Hankinson!' interrupted Peril breathlessly.

‘That is the name,’ said Mrs. Woodfall gravely. ‘It seems he is engaged to her now.’

The colour had been coming and going in Peril’s face all the time that they had been talking, but it now fled quite, leaving her cheeks and lips white, so that she looked all eyes as she turned to Mrs. Woodfall, who watched her with a sense of pity, and of irritation too, at the cross-purposes which, from all she had heard, seemed to characterize this unlucky story from beginning to end. But the pity deepened, the irritation subsided, as she saw how resolutely the girl tried to smile through her agony, and how, without her consciousness, her fingers plucked at the grass, and tore it up tremblingly, in little handfuls.

‘This,’ she observed slowly, ‘is all—news to me—at least—yes, news; though it does not surprise me. I knew he was very fond

of Margaret Hankinson—and I think—she will make him a good wife.’

‘My brother says she is a fine character, though he doesn’t seem quite to understand the fascination she exerts over your cousin,’ said Mrs. Woodfall, feigning not to see the distress which struggled for the mastery in Peril’s face, and speaking as if it were an indifferent topic.

‘Such things are often not to be explained,’ said Peril, still plucking at the grass, still with the same white face, and eyes with a hunted look in them. ‘I should have thought,’ she added, resolutely beating down weakness and faintheartedness, ‘that if she was going to marry him, she would have done so *before* he went out, and would have stood by and helped him. That is what I should—that is what a woman ought to do, I think.’

‘He will not let her, so Paul says; or she would do so.’

‘Ah, he was always very thoughtful and considerate. He wished to spare her. But—do you know if he is going soon?’

‘Very soon now, I believe—this coming autumn, at any rate.’

‘And as a workman—a labourer?’ repeated Peril, to whom this side of the question was only becoming visible, as it were, now that she had grappled with the other, and, to her, more terrible fact, that he was gone from her for ever—definitely engaged to Margaret Hankinson—lost from her life, who would do so much, if he would let her, to make him happy.

‘Yes. My brother advised him not; but he seems to be a young man of strong resolutions, and——’

‘Yes; he is. Wherever he goes he will be honoured and respected,’ said Peril, almost defiantly; ‘and his resolutions, when he

makes them, always have some meaning and some sense in them. But——'

Her eyes began to have a vague and distant look. She seemed to forget Katty, and had altogether lost consciousness of Humphrey's presence ; and he stood and looked at her, and wondered what it was all about. She propped her elbow on her knee, and rested her chin in her hand, and looked across the waters mournfully. The subjective sensations were stronger than those outside, objective things. Mrs. Woodfall's news had struck home to her with the force of an actual blow. The things of the present faded away. Once again she was back at Darkingford, with all the weary, sickening old struggle renewed ; back again in the midst of that afternoon of despair when she had heard her fate and Hugh's read out ; and now, as then, she felt as if all the responsibility rested on her shoulders, as if the intended exile and poverty

of Nowell must be averted, and that by her, since there was no one else to do it.

‘I am afraid I have disturbed you with my news, Miss Nowell, and spoiled your afternoon.’

‘No—oh no!’ said Peril, starting and looking round, and becoming conscious again of the presence of her companions. ‘I feel very glad to have seen you; I ought to have known of this before. It gives me much to think about. Are you going away? May I walk round by the Grange with you?’

‘Surely. We shall be very glad of your company,’ said Katty.

They rose, and all went along the cliff and down the lane together. Mrs. Woodfall asked Peril to come in and sit a little while; but she declined, saying she would come again soon, if she might. And then, stooping, she said:

‘Little Humphrey, will you give me a kiss?’

Humphrey's manners had been carefully looked to; he accepted and returned the salute both graciously and gracefully.

'There is a pony in my uncle's stable,' pursued Peril. 'If you would like to leave your horse at home, and come and see Bonnyface—for that is his name—we will see if you could not ride him. Would you like that?'

The little man's eyes opened wide, and his face beamed with a peculiarly bright look.

'May I, Aunt Katty?'

'Yes, indeed. Miss Nowell is very kind.'

'You are very kind, Miss Nowell,' he said in the same old-fashioned, gracious manner. 'And I should like to come very much. Aunt Katty, I shall tell father.'

'Yes, of course, dear.'

'When may I come, Miss Nowell?'

The treat was so very great and so very unexpected that he wished to arrange all preliminaries, so as not to be balked in the end.

‘To-morrow morning if you like. May he, Mrs. Woodfall? And will you come with him? I should be so glad. Anyone will tell you where Mr. Wistar’s house is. It is called Stanesacre.’

Katty thanked her, and the appointment was made. They parted. Peril passed a weary and sleepless night, revolving all kinds of impossible schemes in her mind. It seemed to her that Hugh was behaving with less than generosity both to herself and Margaret Hankinson, and with less than justice to himself. But she could, in a measure, sympathize with his youthful stiff-neckedness and resolution. She knew how great the temptation would have been to herself to behave in a similar way under similar circumstances, though the plain English of such behaviour was sacrificing any number of other persons on the altar of his own self-esteem, which he no doubt dubbed his proper pride. She could

think of no more feasible plan than that of resolutely confining her expenditure to the sum she would have had if Hugh had received his due. Rather a barren consolation, but it was the only one that then occurred to her.

With the next morning began an intimacy with Katharine Woodfall and her little nephew which deepened daily, and which furnished Mrs. Trelawney with very powerful rivals—rivals whom she was far from delighting in.

END OF VOL. II.

